

THOUGHTS

ON THE

COMMENCEMENT

OF A

NEW PARLIAMENT.



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WITH

AN APPENDIX,

CONTAINING

REMARKS on the LETTER of the Right Hon.
EDMUND BURKE, on the REVOLUTION in
FRANCE.

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D U B L I N:

PRINTED FOR P. WOGAN, P. BYRNE, J. MOORE,
J. JONES, A. GRUEBER, W. CORBET,
W. JONES, R. WHITE, J. RICE,

M.DCC.XCI.

1 Sept. 1971. The

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FEW periods in the history of mankind have been more distinguished than the present, by great, important, and interesting events. The most signal, and the most unexpected revolutions have taken place. An ardent and enlightened zeal for the great interests of mankind has been manifested, in different parts of the globe, and has produced the most salutary consequences. It has been displayed even among those, who had long been enured to the galling chains of despotism, and who seemed to have almost totally forgotten their rights as men, and their claims as citizens.

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Among these events, the late revolution in France is one of the most conspicuous and striking. The transition was so great, and so extraordinary, from such a despotic government as that which had long prevailed in that kingdom, to so free a constitution as that which is now established, that it could not but arrest the attention of all, who were not wholly regardless of the transactions of foreign nations, or of the great interests of mankind. It afforded a sublime pleasure to the friends of liberty, of virtue, of human happiness, to see a great nation shaking off its fetters, compelling its rulers to acknowledge the just claims of the people, and asserting the rights of men, in the noblest and the fullest manner.

From the high sentiments of liberty, which have appeared for some years past among French writers, there was much reason to hope, that some change, favourable to the people, would, by degrees, take place in the government of France. But no man expected such a revolution, as that which has actually been effected. I must at the same time remark, that, as an Englishman, I cannot but feel considerable pleasure at the reflection, that some of the eminent writers of my own country have greatly contributed to diffuse that spirit of freedom, which has lately been exhibited in different parts of Europe, as well as on the other side of the Atlantic.

Atlantic. The French nation have had the generosity to acknowledge this; and much of that flame of liberty, which has characterized the Americans of the present age, was undoubtedly derived from the mother-country, and from that light and knowledge, which were communicated to the British colonies from the LOCKES and the SYDNEYS of England. But, unhappily, at a period when English writers are illuminating the world, and contributing to its emancipation from tyranny, much of the ancient spirit of liberty appears in England itself to be evaporated, and we seem in this respect to be greatly degenerating from our ancestors. A spirit of court servility, and an implicit confidence in the minister, without any just grounds, have lately become so prevalent, that there is too great reason to apprehend, that we have lost much of that vigilance in the support of public freedom, which is essential to its preservation.

At a period, when the most splendid scenes have been exhibited in France, and the noblest sentiments displayed among many of the virtuous and enlightened inhabitants of that kingdom, an Englishman, sincerely attached to the honour and to the interest of his country, cannot but be in a very high degree solicitous, that Great Britain may yet continue to preserve that honourable station, which she has long held among the nations

of the earth ; and that she may still be distinguished, not only by her wealth, her extended commerce, and her love of literature, of science, and of arts, but by the freedom of her constitution, her aversion to every species of tyranny, and an unconquerable resolution to assert and to maintain the rights of human nature.

I rejoice in the freedom of FRANCE ; I rejoice, that so great and respectable a nation has recovered its liberties ; I hope, that they will be confirmed in the fullest manner ; and that no untoward events, no fickleness of the people, nor any iniquitous interposition of foreign powers, will in any degree impede and retard their complete establishment. But I wish, at the same time, that GREAT BRITAIN may still continue free ; that its inhabitants may not degenerate from the virtues of their ancestors ; that our political constitution may be improved ; and that the wisest and best measures may be adopted for its security and permanence.

It is from reflexions and sentiments like these, that I have been led to view, with some degree of solicitude, the Commencement of the Seventeenth Parliament of Great Britain. At the same time, I am willing to cherish the hope, that notwithstanding some strong symptoms of political degeneracy, which have lately been too manifest

fest among us, yet that there may still be found sufficient energy, spirit, and virtue, among the people and the parliament, not only to maintain our ancient rights, but to reform the defects in our constitution, and still farther to advance the freedom, and the felicity of our country.

When I review the transactions of the last parliament, I am very far from finding it entitled to that applause, which has sometimes been bestowed upon it; and it will give me great pleasure, when sufficient evidence is afforded to the public, that the new representatives of the people have more virtue than their predecessors, and that they are sincerely desirous of doing, not merely their own business, or that of the minister, but the business of the nation, and advancing its real interests. At the Commencement of a New Parliament, it must be highly proper for the members of it seriously to consider, in what manner they shall best perform their duty to their constituents, and by what means they may render the most essential services to their country. It may also reasonably be presumed, that such of the members of it as are really well-disposed, and who entered into parliament, not merely for their own private ends, but for the service of the public, will receive with candour, and with such attention as they may deserve, any hints that may appear to be calculated for

for the promotion of these great and important ends, from whatever quarter they may come.

In the transactions of the last Parliament, the debates and proceedings relative to the appointment of a REGENCY, may be considered as among the most important. But in speaking on this subject, I must confess, that I was one of those who were not satisfied with the conduct of either party. It was too manifest, that the object of the two great leading parties was much more the acquisition of power, than any real attachment to the welfare of the Nation, or to the principles of the Constitution. Indeed, in the course of the debates concerning the Regency, we heard much of the King's party, of the Queen's party, and of the Prince of Wales's party ; but no man heard any thing of the party of the People. Nor were the just claims of the People ever fairly, fully, and unequivocally asserted, in either house, during the course of the debates upon the subject.

Of Mr. Pitt's questions respecting the regency, which were voted by the parliament, that which asserted the right of parliament, as the representatives of the people, to appoint a regency, I entirely approved. The doctrine that the prince of Wales was to succeed of course to the regency, or that the parliament

parliament were to be considered merely as a court in which his right was to be recognized, appeared to me to be totally adverse to all the great principles of the constitution. But the appointment of a commission, under the great seal, to give the royal assent to a regency bill, I could view in no other light than as a miserable fiction, invented for the occasion, in order to avoid the appearance of making the executive power originate, where it ought ever to originate, from the authority of the people. The establishment also that was to have been made, in case a regency had taken place, was to have been rendered, by the minister's plan, unnecessarily expensive to the nation, and was obviously calculated for the maintenance of his own influence and power.

Among the censurable transactions of the last Parliament, the exorbitant extension of the EXCISE is entitled to particular attention. It ought to have excited a greater national alarm, and a more vigorous and general opposition, than were produced by it. Without speaking of the act for excising wine, which was justly liable to very strong objections, I shall only observe, that Mr. Pitt's Tobacco Bill was at least as pernicious, and as unconstitutional, as that which had nearly, and very deservedly, driven Walpole from the helm of power. It is impossible for any impartial man to read this voluminous act, which

which consists of more than one hundred and sixty clauses, and many of the regulations of which are highly oppressive, without a full conviction, that it is an act which ought never to have taken place in a free country. The advocates for such laws as these are apt to urge, in their vindication, the necessities of the state; but it does not follow, that because money is wanted by the government, that therefore little regard is to be paid to the principles of the constitution. No man, who will reflect coolly and impartially upon the subject, can possibly doubt, but that taxes, and efficient taxes, may be raised by other and more constitutional modes of taxation. But there will be an end to the liberties of England, if the people suffer their rights to be repeatedly and wantonly invaded, under the pretence of raising a revenue. Whatever may be the wants of government, it is the duty of the representatives of the people to oppose every bill that is calculated to undermine the public liberty. As to the laws of excise, the permanency of this mode of taxation, which has a tendency to render the crown less dependent on the parliament; the power that it gives to officers of the crown to enter men's houses at their own pleasure, and without any warrant from a civil magistrate; the great increase which it occasions of revenue officers appointed by the crown, and acting under its influence; the deprivation of the subject, in excise

excise causes, of the right of trial by jury; these, and various other circumstances, render the excise highly dangerous, and very inconsistent with the genius of a free nation. Indeed, I am fully convinced, that whenever the great body of the people of this country shall be sufficiently enlightened upon the subject, they will say, with a firm and decided tone, We will have no farther Extension of the Excise. Perhaps few instances have occurred, in the history of ministers and of parliaments, of greater ministerial arrogance, and ministerial obstinacy, than were exhibited in carrying the late Tobacco Bill through the two houses, in opposition to the strongest and the fullest evidence of the mischievous tendency of the act, which appears not only to be highly pernicious and dangerous in a constitutional light, but manifestly calculated to diminish the tobacco trade of the country, and eventually to injure the national revenue.

Independently of the general pernicious tendency of the excise, I have observed, both in the last and preceding Parliaments, that, in framing new revenue laws, a proper attention has not been paid to the convenience and accommodation of the subject, nor sufficient pains taken to prevent such laws from being more burthensome to the people than necessary. The subject has been left too much to the mercy of the ministers of the crown,

crown, and was not protected, as he ought to have been, by the national representatives. When a new revenue bill was brought in, the fabrication of it, and the clauses of which it was composed, were left too much to the discretion of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, or perhaps to his secretary; and to them the persons interested often found it necessary to apply, in order to obtain some mitigation, or alteration, of any new imposition. But the merchants and traders of this country have not that security which they ought to have, if, when a new law is framing, which may materially affect their interests, they are obliged to have recourse, not to Parliament, or to a Committee of Parliament, but to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Whenever this is the case, it is manifest, that the representatives of the people do not discharge their duty to their constituents. But a due attention ought to be paid to the accommodation of the subject, both by administration and by parliament. Taxes are levied for the benefit of the community at large; and they ought to be levied in that manner which is least burthensome to the subject. The idea that nothing is to be attended to but the revenue, and that little regard is to be paid to the convenience of the people, is an idea that can never enter into the head of any minister of a truly great and liberal mind.

The Commutation Act is one of those measures, for which great applause has been given to the present Chancellor of the Exchequer. The suppression of smuggling was certainly a very desirable object; but I do not think that the mode by which it was effected, or attempted to be effected, is entitled to much commendation. A tax that tends to exclude light and air from ordinary habitations, that is calculated to lessen the healthfulness and the beauty of the edifices of a country, is substantially a bad tax; and the revenue raised by it is not a compensation for the evil. The same money might undoubtedly be levied under some other denomination, and with less injury to the public.

In the last, as well as in preceding parliaments, the minister of the crown was generally permitted to take the lead, even apparently, in a much greater degree than could be approved, by those who had adopted correct ideas of the constitution. The father of the present minister is reported to have said in the house of commons, that there was a certain modesty in that house, which did not easily suffer itself to contradict a minister; and I observed in the last house of commons, that it seemed to be thought very improper to commence any business of importance, unless the minister were present. Indeed, the manner in which the house often waited

waited for his appearance, as if they could do nothing but under his direction, seemed to me to be very unsuitable to the dignity of a British House of Commons. I hope, that the honour of the house, and of the nation, will be more attended to in the present Parliament; and that the representatives of the people will be of opinion, that they have a right, and that it is their duty, to do the business of the public, whether the minister of the crown chooses to be in his place, or not; and that they will be much more inclined to receive the instructions of their constituents, than to attend to the dictates of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

One circumstance, which deserves attention in our late Parliaments, and especially the last, is the extension of the sessions to so late a season of the year, that the generality of the members have wholly quitted the business of the house, long before the close of the session, in order to retire to their seats in the country. The fifth session of the last Parliament was not closed till the 11th of July, and the sixth not till the 11th of August. But this extension of the session to so late a period, though in a constitutional view it may, unless in a case of real emergency, be regarded as a considerable evil, is a great advantage to a minister who wishes to carry any improper bills through the two houses. As most of the independent members have then

then ceased to give their attendance, the minister has an opportunity of carrying his most obnoxious measures, in thin houses, with much more facility, than if the session were closed at an earlier period of the year. This is probably the real cause of the session being extended so far into the summer; for otherwise, it would certainly be more convenient for the members, and better for the public, that the Parliament should assemble at the beginning of November, and then enter upon business, than have the session extended to July or August. But placemen and pensioners are obliged to attend even in the dog-days; and if the more independent members are in a remote part of the country, or too far from the metropolis to attend the Parliament, the business of the minister will not be neglected, whatever may become of the business of the public. Mr. Pitt's first Tobacco bill was passed in August, 1789. Indeed, though the Sessions of Parliament have lately been carried so far into the year, so little attention has sometimes been paid to the real interest of the nation, that the people have had reason to rejoice when the Parliament broke up; because no additional impositions could be laid upon the public, nor any new laws passed to the injury of the constitution, till the commencement of another session.

Of the various objects, which seem proper to engage the attention of a new Parliament, one of the most important is, a REFORM OF THE REPRESENTATION of the people in the house of commons. Mr. Pitt once made strong professions of great zeal for such a reform. But these professions are now forgotten, and this zeal seems no longer to have any existence. Indeed, the plan of a parliamentary reform, which was proposed by Mr. Pitt, never appeared to me to be a good one; and that it was not so, I know to have been the opinion of many, who had thought much upon the subject. But whatever the merits of his plan might be, he seems now to have totally abandoned it. When a motion was made by Mr. Flood, in the last session of the last Parliament, for " leave to bring in a bill to amend the present representation of the people in the house of commons," Mr. Pitt manifested an extreme dislike to any discussion of the subject, and even applauded some of the most contemptible sophistry that was ever delivered in parliament, which was then advanced with a view of convincing those members, who could not distinguish between the grossest fallacies and sound reasoning, that there was no occasion for any reform whatever.

When nine tenths of the people of this country have no votes in the elections of members

members of Parliament, when so great a part of the nation are constantly taxed without being represented, and obliged to obey laws to which they have never assented, it is in the highest degree absurd to pretend, that the representation is not inadequate, or that a reform is not necessary. But the minister is at present, it seems, of opinion, that it is not yet the proper time; and we have abundant reason to believe, that it never will be the proper time, till a great part of the people shall have spirit and understanding enough to demand, as their undoubted, their unquestionable right, a more just and equal representation in Parliament. Whenever that period shall arrive, the minister, whoever he be, however reluctantly, will find that it is a proper time. In the mean while, the friends of this great, this important, this necessary renovation of the constitution, should adopt every proper measure for effectuating such a reform; and should never lose sight of this great object, from a full conviction, that a reform of Parliament is essential to the security, and to the establishment of British freedom. But besides a reform in the representation, the septennial act, which was originally a flagrant violation of the rights of the people, ought also to be repealed. If the elections of members of Parliament were more frequent, the sentiments of the people would undoubtedly be

be more attended to, both by their representatives, and by the minister.

Among other violations of the principles of the constitution, and of those of justice and humanity, under which a part of the people of this country sometimes labour, and which it would be highly proper for a new Parliament to take into consideration, one is, the practice of **IMPRESSING SEAMEN**. This assumed power, in its own nature, and from the manner in which it is exercised, is totally repugnant to every idea of liberty and justice; nor can any principles of national policy be urged, which, when examined, will amount to a justification of this outrage on humanity. Such, indeed, is the enormity of the practice, that it would, I believe, be found, if the matter were fairly and fully investigated, that a much greater degree of violence, injustice, and oppression, have been exercised upon British subjects, in consequence of the press-warrants lately issued by the Lords of the Admiralty, than have been suffered from the Spaniards by any subjects of the British government, in those transactions which have been expected to give rise to a war between the two nations. If this be the fact, and I believe that an accurate examination would demonstrate it to be so, some other mode of manning our navy ought surely to be adopted. It has been very dishonourable to preceding Parliaments,

liaments, that no more attention was paid to those plans, which have been proposed for manning the fleet, without having recourse to the violent and unconstitutional mode of impressing. But I hope, that the humanity and justice of the present Parliament will adopt proper methods for putting a stop to this most indefensible practice. Besides the cruelty with which impressing is attended, it is well known to be a very expensive service to the nation; and from all the information which I have been able to collect upon the subject, there is no reason to doubt, but that methods might be adopted, by which the fleet might be better manned, with equal expedition, and probably without more expence to the nation, than by the present practice of impressing. But if such methods should be found more expensive, the expence ought to be submitted to, rather than suffer a practice to continue, which is an indelible reproach to a free country.

In the present situation of Great Britain, oppressed with an immense debt, and with heavy taxes, almost without number, it certainly should be one of the prime objects of a wise administration, carefully to avoid all unnecessary wars. I do not mean, that the nation should be tamely insulted, or not assert, on every proper occasion, its just rights; but that wars should not hastily be

engaged in, for questions of mere punctilio; that in the management of disputes with foreign nations, some moderation should be observed; and that no alliances should be entered into, in Germany or elsewhere, that have a natural tendency to involve us in a continental war. In this view, I consider the late Russian treaty as in a very high degree reprehensible. In the treaty of defensive alliance between the King of Great Britain and the King of Prussia, concluded at Berlin on the 13th of August, 1788, are the following stipulations: "The two high contracting parties shall always act in concert for the maintenance of peace and tranquillity; and in case either of them should be threatened with a hostile attack by any power whatever, the other shall employ, without delay, his most efficacious good offices for preventing hostilities, for procuring satisfaction to the injured party, and for effecting an accommodation in a conciliatory manner. But if these good offices should not have the desired effect, in the space of two months, and either of the two high contracting parties should be hostilely attacked, molested, or disturbed, in any of his dominions, rights, possessions, or interests, or in any manner whatever, by sea or by land, by any European power, the other contracting party engages to succour his ally, without delay, in order to maintain each other reciprocally in the possession

" of

" of all the dominions, territories, towns, and places, which belonged to them before the commencement of such hostilities." It would, perhaps, not be very easy to contrive a treaty, that should be better calculated to involve Great Britain in an unnecessary war, than that in which these stipulations are contained. What can Prussia do for England, that can be any compensation for the hazard of being embroiled in a war, whenever any of the territories of the king of Prussia, so surrounded, and some of which have been obtained by such questionable means, shall be attacked by any foreign power? That a nation like that of England, so well able by its own strength to defend all its own possessions, and so differently situated from the kingdom of Prussia, should have patiently and silently acquiesced in such a treaty, as that concluded at Berlin in 1788, is truly astonishing. A close connexion with a military and a despotic monarch, like that of Prussia, so circumstanced as to be always in danger of a war, cannot be beneficial to a commercial nation like Great Britain, which has little real occasion to interfere in any of the disputes upon the continent. Indeed, no treaty concluded with Prussia has ever been beneficial to Great Britain; nor do I believe that any such treaty ever will be beneficial.

The real motive for concluding the Prussian treaty, besides a view to supporting the

late measures respecting Holland, seems to have been an attention to the preservation of the electorate of Hanover; which, if a war should take place, may possibly be attacked; and which a king of Prussia, if his own dominions are not in too much danger, may have it in his power to defend. The electorate of Hanover has been considered, in some degree, as the private patrimony of the King; and, therefore, British ministers have found it beneficial to themselves, and that it tended to keep them in favour and in power, to pay a particular attention to the real or supposed interests of that electorate, in order to gratify the private views or attachments of their royal master.

Something of this kind was foreseen as probable, before the accession of the present family; and, therefore, in an act passed in the twelfth year of the reign of king William, entitled, "An act for the farther limitation of the crown, and better securing the rights and liberties of the subject," is the following clause: "That in case the crown and imperial dignity of this realm shall hereafter come to any person, not being a native of the kingdom of England, this nation be not obliged to engage in any war for the defence of any dominions or territories which do not belong to the crown of England, without the consent

"consent of parliament*." By the spirit of this act it was undoubtedly intended, that if the Elector of Hanover should succeed to the throne of England, no treaties should be entered into with a view to the safety of any of the dominions of the King, as Elector of Hanover, which might eventually involve England in an unnecessary war. But notwithstanding this act, treaties have been repeatedly made, since the accession of the present family, with a view to the electorate of Hanover, which have been extremely pernicious and expensive to this country.

The late king of Prussia, who had himself received enormous sums from England, under the denomination of subsidies, takes notice, in one of the prefaces to his *Histoire de mon Temps*, of the profusion with which English guineas had been squandered in continental connexions†; and he asserts, in another place, that his uncle, George II. " governed England according to the interests of his Electorate‡." Count Algarotti also, speaking of that prince, says, " What the King has most at heart is certainly his electorate of Hanover. This is the com-

* Cay's Edition of the Statutes, vol II. p 355.

† This preface was published in the *Mémoire Historique, &c.* read by count Hertzberg to the royal acad. y at Berlin, on the 25th of January, 1787, and printed in that city the same year.

‡ Oeuvres Posthumes, tom. I p. 48. edit. Berlin, 1783.

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" pass that has uniformly guided the wars of
 " England, since the elevation of the House
 " of Brunswick to the throne of that king-
 " dom ; and the preservation of this elec-
 " torate will STILL CONTINUE to be the
 " ruling principle*." It would have been
 better for this country, and probably better
 for the electorate of Hanover, if, on the ac-
 cession of George I. to the throne of Eng-
 land, the electorate had been resigned to one
 of the younger branches of the family. A
 stipulation of this kind would have been
 highly proper in the act of settlement.

In justification of the late Prussian treaty, the preservation of the balance of power in Europe will probably be urged. But I confess, that to me this appears to be nothing but a mere pretence ; though it is not to be wondered at, that the fabricators of such a treaty should have recourse to such a pretence, when nothing more solid can be alledged in its justification. The balance of Europe is often a popular topic ; but much that is said upon this subject is very little founded upon any due consideration of the real state of things. The state of Europe is so much changed from what it was some years since, that reasonings relative to the balance of Europe, which might have some

* Letters Military and Political, p. 101. second edit.

weight fifty years ago, are now totally inapplicable. The present king of Sweden has published a book, in which he has endeavoured to shew, that the political balance of Europe is in great danger from the power of Russia; he has since concluded a treaty with the empress of Russia; and will probably now employ his industry in settling the balance of Europe, with as much justice and impartiality, as he has already settled the liberties of his own subjects. The late king of Prussia, in a letter to the marquis D'Argens, speaks of the balance of Europe in terms of ridicule; and observes, that "of this disorderly balance Mr. Pitt (lord Chatham) had not been able to find the centre of gravity*." Indeed, the affairs of Europe are now so circumstanced, that it is difficult for the acuteſt politician to determine, on what side the balance is likely to predominate. This, however, we may certainly determine, that a nation deeply involved in debt, and burthened with heavy taxes, as Great Britain now is, should engage in no war to which it is not compelled by necessity, or in any cases but those in which its interests are very essentially concerned.

As war may justly be considered as one of the greatest of human calamities, it must be

* Œuvres Posthumes, tome X. p. 316.

highly

highly rational for any nation seriously to consider, before the commencement of hostilities, whether they have a sufficient reason to engage in war, whether their cause be founded upon justice, and whether they are likely to gain any important advantages, if the contest be finally decided in their favour. But, unfortunately, those to whom it is chiefly left to determine, whether a war shall, or shall not take place, are the least sufferers by it; and, perhaps, even derive from it a considerable additional degree of power and influence. This consideration may lead a speculative man sometimes to inquire, whether the power of making war and peace be not too great and important in its nature, to be so much confided to the discretion of the minister, and so entirely at the pleasure of the crown. It is, indeed, understood, that the power which the parliament possesses of withholding supplies is a sufficient check upon the ministers, and upon the crown; but it should be remembered, that if war be declared, the nation is committed; and though the parliament may withhold supplies, it may be scarcely possible to return to peace, and yet preserve the honour of the nation. Indeed, the truth is, that not only ministers of state, but the people of this country have long been too fond of war. Many individuals derive advantage from it; but the great body of the people must always be sufferers by

by it ; and it is astonishing that a nation, so overwhelmed with debts and taxes, should not be more convinced of the pernicious consequences of war, that they should not be more deeply sensible of the calamities with which it is attended, and be less forward to engage in it.

One great evil which attends the power of making war and peace, and concluding treaties, being wholly vested in the ministers of the crown, is, that wars may be commenced, and treaties concluded, on maxims very inconsistent with the genius of a free people, and on principles totally repugnant to the real interests of the nation. It must be very unnatural in the inhabitants of a country, who have distinguished themselves by their ardent love of liberty, to engage in any wars to compel another nation to an implicit submission to the authority of their prince or sovereign, and to countenance or conclude any treaties of which this is the object. But there may be periods, when such a conduct, however inconsistent with the wishes and the interests of the people of England, may be very congenial to the views of the court of England. It would certainly be more safe, honourable, and advantageous to the nation, that no regular war should be commenced, nor any treaty concluded, but by the authority of parliament. A power might be granted

granted to the crown, of employing the forces of the nation in its defence, in case of any immediate hostile attack; though neither the minister, nor the council, were invested with the power of issuing a formal declaration of war, unless by the sanction and authority of parliament.

Much credit has been given to the present chancellor of the exchequer for his conduct respecting Holland; but, as it appears to me, with very little reason. I mean not here to enter into a minute discussion of the subject; but I shall take the liberty of observing, that it is my opinion, in which I know I am not singular, that the conduct of Great Britain respecting Holland, in the disputes between the republic, or a great part of the republic, and the stadholder, was extremely unjust and indefensible; and it will, I apprehend, be finally found to have been impolitic. There are opinions which obtain for a time, and which even become popular, and which afterwards are for ever abandoned: such, I think, will be the event, respecting those favourable sentiments which have been entertained by many, of that mode of interference which was adopted by Great Britain, in the disputes that subsisted between a considerable part of the Dutch nation and the stadholder.

That

That there were great defects in the constitution of the Dutch government, I readily admit; the government of the republic of Holland was too aristocratical; but regular and proper measures were taking by the Dutch patriots for the improvement of their constitution; and the beneficial effects of these measures have been prevented by the interference of Prussia and Great Britain. Freedom is not now enjoyed in Holland. That the liberties of the Dutch nation should, in any degree, have been lessened, by the interposition, or the assistance, of Great Britain, I consider as highly dishonourable to my country. But, that this is the fact, will be doubted by no man, who shall impartially investigate the subject. Whatever might have been the errors, whatever the inconsistencies in the constitution of Holland, the disputes respecting the internal government of that republic should not have been adjusted by Prussian troops; and no interposition in this case could have been honourable to Great Britain, but that which should have given the Dutch nation a fair and full opportunity of establishing that mode of government, which was thought by themselves to be most conducive to their real interests.

It has been supposed by many, that maxims of policy were a sufficient apology for our

our conduct respecting Holland. But no maxims of policy can justify transactions that are flagrantly unjust; and I believe that the interests of nations, as well as of individuals, would eventually be best promoted by an adherence to the rules of justice. Whatever may be the politics of the stadholder's court; whatever may be the private attachments of the prince of Orange and the king of England, from their consanguinity; there is no reason to believe, that any friendship is established between the British and the Dutch nations; and, if a war should take place, we shall probably derive little effectual assistance from the navy of Holland.

As the foreign politics of Mr. Pitt do not appear to be entitled to much commendation, neither do I think that he has any just claim to applause for his conduct respecting the internal government of this country. His administration has, indeed, been very far from being favourable to the interests of public liberty; and on various occasions he has evinced, that he has little attachment to its principles. When a motion was made, by Mr. Powis, in 1786, in behalf of the inhabitants of Quebec, for leave to bring in a bill to amend the Quebec act, and to render the government of that colony more consonant to the principles of the English constitution, the motion was strenuously opposed by

by Mr. Pitt. But the same year a new and very pernicious clause being introduced into the mutiny-bill, by which a greater number of persons than formerly were subjected to military law, that clause found in Mr. Pitt a defender, and was accordingly carried. The eloquence of the chancellor of the exchequer was also very zealously employed, in 1787, in support of the bill for farming the tax on post horses*, which was accordingly passed into a law, though extremely adverse to the principles of the English constitution.

When a bill was brought into parliament by Mr. Marsham, "for securing the freedom of election, by excluding persons holding places in the navy and the ordnance from voting for members of parliament," it was very vehemently opposed by Mr. Pitt, who was of opinion, that though the influence of the crown, before he came into power, was too great, and had been very properly diminished, yet that there was now no occasion for any fresh diminution. The influence now, we may presume, had passed into very good and safe hands, and there could be no reason for any farther doubt or distrust upon the subject. It was in 1786,

* Debrett's Parliamentary Register, vol. XXII. p. 190, 191, 198.

that

that Mr. Pitt brought in his bill for subjecting wine to the laws of excise; and on that occasion he opposed a motion which was made by Mr. Beanfoy, and which would have made the act somewhat less pernicious, " for giving to the subject, in all cases of an information exhibited in pursuance of the bill, an optional right of being tried by a jury of his peers*." But this would have been too great a compliment to the principles of liberty, and to the spirit of the constitution. The arguments employed by Mr. Pitt against the clauses were remarkably sophistical; but the house were too complaisant to consider any arguments of the minister in that light, and the clause was accordingly rejected.

That the present chancellor of the exchequer possesses eminent abilities cannot reasonably be questioned; but that these abilities have been much employed for the benefit of his country, I can perceive but very little evidence. The bulk of mankind are too apt to be deceived by specious appearances. A man may have acquired a habit of speaking plausibly, and even eloquently in parliament, and be able to defend his measures with great dexterity, and yet be a very bad minister of state. It might have been

* Debrett's Parliamentary Register, vol. XX. p. 335, &c.
a circumstance

a circumstance fortunate enough for Mr. Pitt's future reputation, and probably much happier for his country, if he had continued longer out of office, and had had time to acquire a more correct knowledge of the principles of the English constitution, and a more sincere attachment to it, than he appears hitherto to have attained. He has some of the faults of his illustrious father, but I do not find that he possesses his virtues. He has shewn the same inclination to be in office, and the same zeal for German continental connexions, when that zeal was favourable to a continuance in power; but we seek in vain for that energetic eloquence, for that generous enthusiasm, in support of the rights of men, which were repeatedly displayed by the earl of Chatham.

The great and implicit confidence, which a considerable part of the nation seem, for some time past, to have had in Mr. Pitt, appears to me to have been totally destitute of any solid foundation. In saying this, I do not mean to speak the language of any particular party; I am of no party, I never was of any party, but that of Freedom, and of my Country. But I think, that there has been much national delusion, so far as it has been national, in the almost unbounded confidence that has been placed in the present chancellor of the exchequer. Several circumstances,

circumstances, however, have greatly contributed to this partiality in his favour. He derived no inconsiderable degree of lustre from the splendour of his father's character; and he appeared in parliament, at an early age, with great advantage. Before he came into power, he also exhibited very patriotic sentiments; and when he entered into office, an high degree of credit was given him on account of his youth, and the supposed purity of his intentions; though that species of faith, it may be presumed, is now considerably lessened. It was, indeed, certainly not natural to expect, in so young a man as Mr. Pitt, all the art and duplicity of an old and practised minister. But his inexperienced youth was not without great and important assistance. In the science of ministerial management, and ministerial manœuvres, he has undoubtedly derived very signal advantages from the sagacious counsels of his tried and approved friends, Mr. Charles Jenkinson, now lord Hawkesbury, and Mr. Henry Dundas, two gentlemen whose political talents and merits have been long well known to the public.

Much has been said relative to the prosperous state, in which the nation is supposed to have been during the administration of Mr. Pitt. But it was not sufficiently considered, that this has been chiefly the consequence

consequence of the change from war to peace, which, by occasioning an immense alteration in the public expences, must necessarily greatly improve the situation of the nation: and this would naturally have been the case, whoever had been minister. In truth, the fact appears to be, that whatever prosperous circumstances the nation may be now in, are the result of the transition from war to peace, of the activity and industry of the people, the energy of the English character, the fertility of our soil, our extensive commerce, our great national resources, and the general excellency of our laws and constitution; and are, so far as I can discern, derived in no manner whatever from any measures that have originated in the wisdom, or in the virtue of Mr. Pitt. And as to his views and conduct respecting general freedom, the terms in which he has spoken of the French revolution, his enormous extension of the excise, his manner of treating the late motion for a reform in the representation of the people in the house of commons, together with the sentiments expressed by him on the application to parliament for a repeal of the Test and Corporation acts, appear to me to afford, when united, evidence of too decisive a nature, that he is not a sincere friend to the interests either of civil or of religious liberty; and that he is not a minister in whom the people, in any

great question respecting the rights of men, can place any rational dependance.

Besides the circumstances that I have already mentioned, which have been favourable to Mr. Pitt's reputation, some other incidents, in which he had no concern whatever, have accidentally been the means of leading many persons to have an unreasonable confidence in his administration. The revolution in France, and the commotions in Holland and in Flanders, naturally induced many foreigners to place large sums in the English funds; and thus these events greatly contributed to raise the price of stocks. These transactions were certainly not brought about by Mr. Pitt, nor had he the least merit in them: but they had a great tendency towards raising his reputation among the stockholders. It is, indeed, one of the great evils attendant on the national debt, that it causes a considerable number of persons in this country to be inclined to support any minister, however censurable and unconstitutional may be his measures, if they suppose them calculated to keep up the price of stocks, and to secure, though only for a short time, the advantages which they conceive themselves to derive from the funds.

The national revenue has lately been repeatedly represented to be in a state highly prosperous,

prosperous, and the merit of this has been chiefly attributed to the measures of Mr. Pitt. How far the national revenue is in a prosperous state, I shall not take upon me to decide; but I must observe, that, considering the great number of new taxes that have been laid, in a time of peace, it can be no wonder, that the public revenue should be, at least apparently, in a situation somewhat prosperous. But if the revenue be increased, the people must have severely felt such numerous and oppressive taxes; and every augmentation of immediate revenue by such means is far from being a national advantage. There is much reason to believe, that some of the new regulations respecting the revenue have been formed upon very narrow and contracted views, calculated to lessen various branches of trade, to discourage men of property from carrying on several valuable manufactures, and eventually to decrease both the national revenue and commerce. And when we are told of the present prosperous state of the revenue, one circumstance should be at least remembered, which I apprehend to be a most undoubted fact, that such heavy and oppressive taxes have never been laid, during a time of profound peace, by any minister in this country, from the time of William Rufus to the present hour, as have been imposed during the administration of Mr. Pitt.

It was highly dishonourable to the last house of commons, and must ever be recorded to its dishonour, while any impartial history of it shall remain, that so great a number of its members voted against a repeal of the Test and Corporation acts. I blush for the honour of my country, when I reflect, that at the close of the eighteenth century, when the national assembly of France has solemnly declared, that "all citizens being equal in the eye of the law, are equally eligible to all honours, places, and employments, according to their different abilities, without any other distinction than that created by their virtues and talents;" that, at such a period, such laws should be thought necessary or proper in Great Britain as the Test and Corporation acts. It is a just subject of surprize, that so large a part of that nation which has produced BACON, LOCKE, and NEWTON, should yet be so unenlightened. To suppose that a particular mode of receiving the sacrament, or adopting any dogmas of artificial theology, can be an indispensable requisite for qualifying a man to hold any civil office in the community to which he belongs, is one of those Gothic absurdities, which are suited only to the ages of ignorance and barbarism. There is no other method, therefore, of retrieving the honour of the nation, but by repealing these laws, and

and some others of a similar nature, which at present disgrace our statute books, and which are equally hostile to the interests of truth and reason, and to the common rights of mankind.

Among other important objects, which would be proper to engage the attention of a new parliament, one is, A REVISION OF THE PENAL LAWS. That our capital punishments are too numerous, and that punishments are often not properly proportioned to the nature of offences, and to the degrees of guilt, can be doubted by no man of equity or humanity, by whom the subject shall be investigated. Indeed, many of our penal statutes, from their sanguinary nature, are certainly in a very high degree dishonourable to the country. In 1787, a motion was made by Mr. Minchin, for leave to bring in a bill, to appoint commissioners to examine into the state of all the penal laws now in force in the kingdom, and to report their opinion thereon to the house of commons. But this very just and proper motion was opposed by Mr. Pitt. Unfortunately, there is a very mischievous species of pride, by which ministers of state appear sometimes to be actuated, which leads them to oppose any attempts that are made to introduce any new kind of reformation, or any new regulations, though manifestly beneficial

beneficial to the public, and even though they should not immediately interfere with the views of government, merely because such measures, or plans of reform, did not originate with themselves. This is one of the evils resulting from that extreme complaisance to ministers of state, and profound deference to their opinions, by which our late parliaments have been too much distinguished.

Of the various modes of raising money for the service of government, which have been much practised for some years past, one is that of LOTTERIES. The pernicious effects of this mode of raising money have been repeatedly pointed out, and are so generally acknowledged, that scarcely any man entertains the least doubt upon the subject. But notwithstanding this, lotteries continue to be supported by those in administration; which could not be the case, if the welfare of the people were really the object of those to whom the powers of government are entrusted. As I am speaking of the conduct of persons in administration, I shall here also remark, that at a period when the French nation are abolishing all titles, our ministers for some time past have been acting as if they supposed that one of the most important and useful offices of government was to make new lords." A strong representation

from

from parliament to the crown, on the great increase of the peerage during the present reign, would, I apprehend, be a very just and seasonable measure.

Another object, which might be proper to engage the attention of parliament, is the present state of THE SILVER AND THE COPPER COINAGE, which is a disgrace to the nation. I know that this is considered as the business of government; but I know, at the same time, that it is the business of parliament to see that the executive officers of government discharge their duty to the public. It is said, that considerable difficulties would attend the adjustment of such a new silver coinage, as should come into general circulation. Of this I am not insensible; but these difficulties are no reason why nothing should have been done, in a matter of such importance, at least nothing that has been effectual, during the whole course of so long a reign as the present.

The new act, passed in 1789, by which additional stamp duties were laid on newspapers and advertisements, was not favourable to the liberty of the press, nor was it so intended. Besides the additional revenue from the increase of the stamp-duties, the avowed object was, to secure the payment of

of the stamp-duties; but the real design seems to have been, to put news-paper printers, and the proprietors of news-papers, more in the power of the commissioners of the stamp-duties, and of the government, than they were before, and to render prosecutions of proprietors of news-papers, as well as of printers, if it should be thought expedient by government, more practicable. This is done by the clause by which it is enacted, that, "from and after the first day of August, 1789, no printer or publisher of any news-paper now printed or published, or which may hereafter be printed or published, in which any advertisements, liable to the several duties by this or any former act or acts imposed, shall receive from the said commissioners, or any person or persons employed by them, any stamped paper for printing any such intelligence or occurrence thereon, until the proprietor or proprietors interested in the said paper, or *such and so many of the said proprietors as are, in the judgment of the said commissioners*, or any three or more of them, of sufficient ability to answer the said duties payable on advertisements, shall join in the security (to government) for the punctual payment of the duties." By this clause the commissioners of the stamp-duties are put in possession of the names not only of the printers, but of the several proprietors

proprietors of news-papers, and of legal evidence of their being such. This act also contains a clause, by which a penalty of five pounds is laid on all those who shall even lend a news-paper for hire. This is a refinement in finance below the genius of George Grenville; and which even that gentleman, though stiled by the father of the present minister "a pepper-corn financier," would probably have regarded with contempt.

As I am speaking of taxes relating to the press, I shall take this opportunity of remarking, that some of the late stamp-duties, duties on paper, &c. have been laid on literature with rather too unsparing a hand. The stamp-duties and expences of advertisements are so high, that an author has often seven or eight pounds to pay even for advertising a pamphlet; which is certainly a very heavy tax on literature. As our present nobility, and persons of rank and influence, are not remarkable for their liberal patronage of literature, they should not be quite so ready as they are to do it injury, or to concur in those measures that burthen and oppress it.

When a new parliament shall have leisure to attend, not merely to temporary objects,

objecls, but to those measures that may be lastingly beneficial to the nation, it would be highly proper to advert to those real improvements in our constitution, which may be dictated by sound wisdom, and impartial investigation. I would not wish to have any alteration made in the general system of our laws, or in our constitution, but on the most mature deliberation: but to suppose that the English constitution is so perfect, that no improvements can be made in it; and that whilst advances are continually making in knowledge, our civil and political regulations ought to undergo no alterations, can arise only from extreme bigotry, and from very narrow and very contracted views.

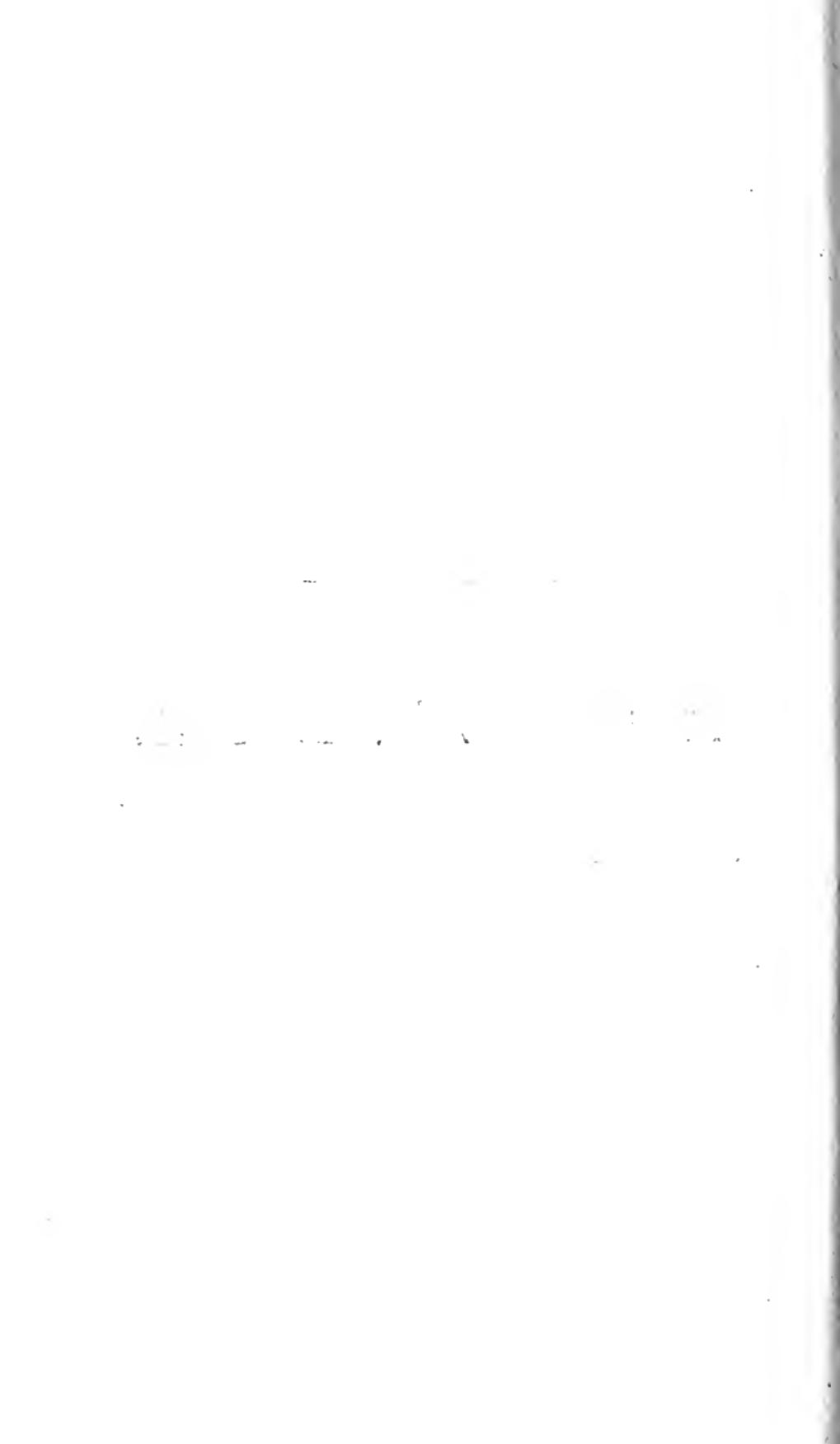
Let us be permitted to hope, that many of the public evils, which are now justly complained of, will be removed by the virtue and the wisdom of the present parliament; that they will adopt, and carry into execution, such plans for a reform in the representation of the people in the house of commons, and for shortening the duration of parliaments, as shall be most congenial to the spirit of the constitution; that they will repeal unjust and oppressive laws; that they will be careful, in passing new laws, not to violate the just rights of the people; that they will remember, that the maintenance

nance of the public liberty is an object of infinitely greater magnitude and importance, than any new arrangements in finance, or pretended augmentations of the national revenue; that they will be vigilant in guarding the people from any secret or open attacks upon their rights by the ministers of the crown; and that the aim and result of their most solemn deliberations will be, establishing the freedom, and advancing the real interests and prosperity of Great Britain.

APPENDIX.



A P P E N D I X.



A P P E N D I X.

SINCE this pamphlet was written, and the greatest part of it printed, the Right Hon. EDMUND BURKE has published, " Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in certain Societies in London relative to that Event, in a Letter intended to have been sent to a Gentleman in Paris." In this piece Mr. Burke has very warmly attacked the proceedings of the Society for Constitutional Information; and of the Revolution Society of London; and as I am a member of both those Societies, and was one of those who the most heartily concurred in the particular proceedings which have given so much umbrage to Mr. Burke,
I shall

I shall take this opportunity of making some remarks on his publication.

Of Mr. Burke I shall previously observe, that I have always entertained a high respect for the talents and character of this very ingenious, eloquent, and learned writer, though I could not always concur with him in sentiment; and I have considered many of his parliamentary exertions as justly entitled to great and distinguished applause. I cannot, therefore, but most sincerely regret, that such admirable abilities should be employed, in productions so little friendly to some of the most important interests of mankind, as his late "Reflections on the Revolution in France."

At the beginning of his book Mr. Burke gives his French correspondent some account of the two Societies whose conduct he arraigns. But his account of these Societies is not remarkably courteous, and not very accurate. Of the Society for Constitutional Information, he says, among other things,

' That the institution of this Society appears
 ' to be of a charitable, and so far of a laudable, nature: it was intended for the circulation, at the expence of the members,
 ' of many books, which few others would
 ' be at the expence of buying; and which
 ' might

' might lie on the hands of the booksellers,
 ' to the great loss of an useful body of men*.'
 The designs of this Society were not quite
 so charitable either to authors, or booksel-
 lers, as Mr. Burke supposes. The intention
 of the Society, and the object of their in-
 stitution, as expressed by themselves, was
 " to diffuse throughout the kingdom, as
 " universally as possible, a knowledge of the
 " great principles of Constitutional Free-
 " dom, particularly such as respected the
 " election and duration of the representa-
 " tive body." With this view constitutional
 tracts, and essays and extracts from various
 authors, such as Sydney, Locke, Trenchard,
 lord Somers, and many others, were printed,
 and distributed *gratis*, at the expence of the
 Society: but no authors, or booksellers, de-
 rived any pecuniary advantage from the
 publications of the Society. In justice to
 the Society, I shall also observe, that I have
 never known any body of men whose views
 appeared to be more pure and patriotic, and
 which consisted in general of persons of
 more integrity, or of more unblemished char-
 acters. Nor was it so obscure a Society
 as it is represented by Mr. Burke. This
 " poor charitable club," as he is pleased po-
 litely to stile it, has numbered among its
 members, lord Surrey, the present duke of

* Reflections on the Revolution in France, p 3

Norfolk, the duke of Richmond, the earl of Eflingham, Sir William Jones. Mr. Sheridan, Sir Cecil Wray, Mr. James Martin, the late excellent Dr. John Jebb, and many other very respectable men.

The vote of congratulation to the National Assembly of France, which has been so severely attacked by Mr. Burke, originated in the Revolution Society, though it was afterwards adopted by the Society for Constitutional Information. The Revolution Society Mr. Burke styles "a club of Dissenters*;" and it is true, that this Society was originally established by Dissenters, who, as a body, have always been zealously attached to the Revolution, and to those principles of civil and religious liberty, which they conceive to be naturally connected with that important event. But, for some years past, many members of the established church have attended their annual and other meetings. At some of those meetings I have also occasionally seen lord Surrey, the present duke of Norfolk, the marquis of Carmarthen, now duke of Leeds, the duke of Richmond, and the duke of Manchester: for lords, when they are out of office, will sometimes do themselves the honour to appear as members of such Societies. The

* Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 4.
meetings

meetings of the Revolution Society have likewise been attended by very respectable members of the House of Commons.

But the meeting of the Society, which has principally given offence to Mr. Burke, was that of the fourth of November, 1789. ‘ I never heard,’ says he, ‘ that any public measure, or political system, much less that the merits of the constitution of any foreign nation, had been the subject of a formal proceeding at their festivals; until, to my inexpressible surprize, I found them in a sort of public capacity, by a congratulatory address, giving *an authoritative sanction* to the proceedings of the National Assembly in France*.’

On the day referred to by Mr. Burke, a motion was made in the Revolution Society by Dr. Price, that the following congratulatory address to the National Assembly of France should be agreed to, and transmitted to them, signed by the chairman:

‘ The Society for commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain, disdaining national partialities, and rejoicing in every

* *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 5.

' triumph of liberty and justice over arbitrary power, offer to the National Assembly of France their congratulations on the Revolution in that country, and on the prospect it gives to the first kingdoms in the world, of a common participation in the blessings of civil and religious liberty.

' They cannot help adding their ardent wishes of an happy settlement of so important a Revolution, and at the same time expressing the particular satisfaction, with which they reflect on the tendency of the glorious example given in France to encourage other nations to assert the unalienable rights of mankind, and thereby to introduce a general reformation in the governments of Europe, and to make the world free and happy.'

This address was accordingly unanimously agreed to, and being signed by earl Stanhope, who acted as chairman of the Society on that occasion, was transmitted to the Duke de Rochefoucault at Paris. It was received in the National Assembly with great applause, and the archbishop of Aix, then president of the National Assembly, by their direction wrote a letter to lord Stanhope, as chairman of the Revolution Society,
' expressing

‘ expressing the lively and deep sensibility
 ‘ with which the National Assembly of
 ‘ France received the address of the Revo-
 ‘ lution Society in England, which breathed
 ‘ those sentiments of humanity and univer-
 ‘ sal benevolence, that ought to unite toge-
 ‘ ther, in all countries of the world, the
 ‘ true friends of liberty and of the happy-
 ‘ ness of nations.’ In a letter written by
 the duke de Rochefoucault to Dr Price on
 that occasion, that nobleman also says, that
 the National Assembly had seen, in the ad-
 dress of the Revolution Society, ‘ the dawn
 ‘ of a glorious day, in which two nations,
 ‘ who had always esteemed each other, not-
 ‘withstanding their political divisions, and
 ‘ the diversity of their governments should
 ‘ contract an intimate union, founded on
 ‘ the similarity of their opinions, and their
 ‘ common enthusiasm for liberty.’

In the address of congratulation, voted by
 the Revolution Society, they had certainly
 no idea, as Mr. Burke has stated, of giving
 any “authoritative sanction” to the proceed-
 ings of the National Assembly of France.
 Nor had they any intention to deceive, as
 Mr. Burke not very candidly supposes, by
 communicating a false idea of the nature or
 importance of their society. Whatever was
 done respecting the Revolution in France in
 the Revolution Society of London, was done

in the most open and public manner; and any information concerning the Society might have been easily obtained, either by Englishmen or by Frenchmen, who had thought proper to make any inquiries concerning it. As to any supposed irregularity in the address of such a society to such a body as the National Assembly of France, they were aware that it might be liable to some objection of that kind; and, therefore, in the letter which was sent to the duke de Rochefoucault, requesting him to present the address to the National Assembly, it was observed, that 'the Society considered the National Assembly as acting for the world, as well as for the great kingdom it represented, and therefore hoped that their address was not an improper intrusion; or, if it was, that it would be excused as an effusion of zeal in the cause of general liberty and human happiness, which no considerations of impropriety had been able to suppress.'

It was the design of the Revolution Society to testify to the French nation, that notwithstanding the ancient hostility which has subsisted between England and France, there were many of the English who sincerely rejoiced that the French had regained their liberties, and wished to see them fully established. It was with the same view that

that more than six hundred persons assembled in the city of London, on the 6th of July, 1790, in order to celebrate the Revolution in France, on the same day in which it was so magnificently celebrated at Paris. I attended this meeting in London with an high degree of pleasure, as I have always wished for the establishment of liberty in France*, and been desirous of promoting every public testimony of the same sentiments among my countrymen. But Mr. Burke seems to be of opinion, that public declarations, respecting the transactions of

* Before the congratulatory address of the Revolution Society, and before the French Revolution had taken place, I had expressed, and very sincerely, my wishes for the establishment of liberty in France. On the 4th of November, 1788, it being a century from the period of the Revolution, I delivered a short oration to the Revolution Society, by their desire, and which at their request was printed. In a note to this is the following passage, which was published many months before the destruction of the Bastile, and the other events which have contributed to the establishment of the French revolution. ‘ I sincerely wish success to all the efforts of the French nation for the recovery of their liberties ; and I should rejoice to see them possessed of a constitution similar to that of England. It must, indeed, be the wish of every friend to the rights of mankind, that the blessings of freedom may be extended to the whole human race. Having mentioned the French nation, I shall also remark, that it is ardently to be desired, that England and France may no longer continue their ancient hostility against each other ; but that France may regain possession of her liberties ; and that two nations, so eminently distinguished in arms, and in literature, instead of exhausting themselves in sanguinary wars, for no valuable purpose, may unite together in communicating the advantages of freedom, science, and the arts, to the most remote regions of the earth.’

foreign

foreign countries, should be made only by persons invested with authority. It is, however, not among lords of the treasury, or secretaries of state, or the favourites of a court, that men distinguished by their zeal for the promotion of human liberty, and human happiness, are often to be found. They who are invested with the powers of government in any country, may be actuated by very different motives from those of an enlarged philanthropy; but that is no reason why the inhabitants of a free country, or any part of them, should not testify, if they judge it expedient, in the most public and solemn manner, their joy at such events as happen in other countries, which may tend to the advantage of such countries, to advance the liberty of the inhabitants, and to increase the felicity of mankind. Such intercourses between different nations are calculated to promote that enlarged and comprehensive benevolence, the diffusion of which would communicate peace and happiness to the world.

The meeting in London, on the 14th of July, 1790, to celebrate the French revolution, gave rise to the Anglo-Gallic festival at Nantes, on the 23d of August following, to which all the English in that city, and in the neighbouring towns, were invited. This festival was given by the *Société des Amis de la*

la Constitution à Nantes, a society consisting of several hundred members, and from that society M. Français, their president, and M. Bougon*, were sent as deputies to the Revolution Society of London. Mr. Burke seems much offended at the proceedings of this society†, as well as that of the societies in London, who testified their joy at the Revolution in France. But to me it appears, that the Anglo-Gallic festival at Nantes‡, in which Frenchmen and Englishmen united together as brethren, and testified the most ardent desire for the liberty and happiness of both nations, and that perpetual peace and harmony might be established between them, was, in the eye of reason and humanity, a much more pleasing scene, than any that were exhibited in those ages of chi-

* These gentlemen, during their residence in London, were much and deservedly respected for the politeness of their manners, the good sense and knowledge which they displayed, their love of liberty, and the strong desire which they manifested to promote perpetual peace and union between France and Great Britain. Some other persons, as well as Mr. Burke, might possibly entertain suspicions respecting the nature of these gentlemen's commission: but they had evidently no other aim than that of testifying their regard, and that of those who sent them, for the people of England, and advancing the interests of liberty and peace in both nations. As to the intimation that seems to be thrown out by Mr. Burke, that these gentlemen came here as a kind of missionaries for the propagation of infidelity, and of *atheistical fanaticism*, this is an idea that is certainly destitute of the least foundation.

† *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 227.

‡ Vid the account of this *Fête Anglo-Française*, printed at Nantes in 8vo. in 1790.

valry, of which Mr. Burke seems to be so much enamoured. Of these meetings, both in France and in England, I have the fullest conviction, that they originated in the best and the worthiest motives, in an extended philanthropy, and in an ardent zeal for those great rights of mankind, compared with which the private interests of kings, as individuals, are entitled to little notice or regard.

But Mr. Burke, adverting to the address of the Revolution Society, says, 'I must be tolerably sure, before I venture publicly to congratulate men upon a blessing, that they have really received one*; and also that the circumstances are what render every civil and political scheme beneficial or noxious to mankind†. On these principles the conduct of the Revolution Society may be vindicated. Before their address of congratulation was presented, they had received sufficient evidence, that the French nation had emancipated themselves from a form of government, which was certainly in a very high degree despotic. They had chosen a body of national representatives, whose interest it was to promote the welfare of their country, and who appeared to be

* Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 9.

† ibid. p. 3.

actuated by the worthiest motives. Indeed, more noble, and more patriotic sentiments, were never exhibited in any country, than were displayed during the course of the late revolution in France. Great and important advances had also been made in the formation of a free constitution of government for that kingdom; and the rights of men had been declared and ascertained, with a clearness and precision that has scarcely ever been equalled in any of the revolutions of nations. These were sufficient grounds for the conduct of the Revolution Society of London, in voting and transmitting their address of congratulation; nor could it be necessary, previously to such a measure, that they should wait for the final settlement and completion of the French constitution.

Mr. Burke says of the French nation, that 'they have been tempted to throw off 'their allegiance to their sovereign, as well 'as the ancient constitution of their coun- 'try.*' These are well sounding words; but if the French, by throwing off their allegiance to their sovereign, which was not without reason, and the ancient constitution of their country, have obtained real liberty, and a better constitution, they have acted very wisely and rationally. And as

* *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p 77, 78.

to the supposed degradation of the king, it was nothing but a degradation from a power, which neither he, nor any of his ancestors, ought ever to have possessed.

Mr. Burke declaims very copiously, and very eloquently, on some irregularities, and acts of violence, that have taken place in France since the Revolution. It was not to be expected that a people, just emerging from a despotic government to an high degree of liberty, should in every respect act with perfect discretion, wisdom, and moderation. But after all the pathetic representations made by Mr. Burke of the transactions of the 6th of October, 1789, and after taking into the account the preceding and subsequent transactions, we may venture to affirm, that no revolution of such importance, and such magnitude, was ever effected with so little bloodshed. Many circumstances before, and after the revolution, naturally exasperated the people, and excited them to acts of violence. The firing on the people in the gardens of the Tuilleries on the 12th of July, 1789, justly increased the suspicions of the inhabitants of Paris respecting the designs of the court; and when the National Assembly was conceived to be in danger, when foreign troops were brought to act against the citizens, when artillery was pointed against the capital, when the ministry

ministry was changed, and mareschal Broglie was made minister of war, the people had abundant reason to believe, that all which had been done in favour of their liberties was about to be over-turned. They distrusted the king, and they considered the queen as undoubtedly hostile to the national freedom. These circumstances naturally excited the indignation of the people ; their violence was increased by the scarcity of corn which then prevailed ; and to these and similar causes the disorders which arose may justly be attributed. It should also be remembered, that in a time of civil commotion and tumult, false rumours may operate powerfully on the minds of the multitude, and lead them to acts of which they would not be guilty, were they accurately acquainted with the real state of things.

Mr. Burke seems to be much affected with the present state of the king of France, under the idea of his being an imprisoned king. But if this statement of Mr. Burke were precisely the case, an imprisoned monarch is an inconsiderable evil compared with that of an enslaved nation. Among other statements which Mr. Burke makes, relative to the behaviour of the French to their king, he says, that they have rebelled ' against a mild and lawful monarch, with more fury, outrage, and insult, than ever any

' any people has been known to rise against
 ' the most illegal usurper, or the most san-
 ' guinary tyrant*' But without referring
 to the histories of other nations, surely our
 own history will afford instances of kings,
 who have experienced much rougher treat-
 ment, than any which has yet been offered
 to Lewis the Sixteenth. Our Charles the
 First, as Mr. Burke well knows, was pub-
 licly executed before the front of his own
 palace, and his son James the Second was
 dethroned, and for ever banished from the
 kingdom. In more ancient times, Richard
 the Second was dethroned by parliament,
 and died in confinement, though the man-
 ner of his death is differently related. Henry
 the Sixth also died in the Tower, and by a
 violent death, according to the generality of
 our historians.

Though Mr. Burke expresses great con-
 cern for the present condition of the king of
 France, he endeavours still more to engage
 the passions of his readers against the re-
 volution, by his pathetic representations of
 the supposed sufferings of the queen of
 France. I do not know that any authentic
 information has been transmitted to this
 country of any severe sufferings of the queen:
 but what are the private and personal inte-

* *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 56.

rests and feelings of a queen of France, or of an hundred queens of France, though decorated with all the beauty and accomplishments with which Mr. Burke has complimented the present queen, compared with the freedom and the happiness of more than twenty-five millions of people? No knight-errants, we may presume, will be found in this country, nor probably in any other, to sally forth in defence of king Lewis, or his virtuous and distressed consort, notwithstanding those enchanting graces in the fair queen, which Mr. Burke has displayed with so much eloquence and gallantry.

Indeed, our ingenious author himself remarks, that “the age of chivalry is gone*;” and, therefore, we may easily believe, that the dull, and unsentimental people of the present age, will not think it necessary for the peace of the world, that ten thousand swords should leap from their scabbards†, whenever a disrespectful, or even a menacing look, is cast at a queen of France, or at a queen of any other country. We may also venture to be of opinion, that it will be much better that a nation, like the French, consisting of gallant men, of men of honour, and of cavaliers‡, should draw their

* *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 113.

† *Ibid*. p. 112.

‡ *Ibid*. p. 112.

swords, whenever it be necessary, in defence of the liberties of their country, rather than in defence of any pretended privileges of queens, or any assumed and arbitrary prerogatives of kings.

It is in no respect wonderful, that kings should sometimes be “ hurled from their “ thrones,” and that this should occasionally be done with circumstances that may aggravate their sense of the calamity attendant on their fall. But it is truly wonderful, that such great numbers of the human race should submit, with so much servility, to men invested with the regal dignity, who are totally unworthy of the office they bear, and to whom at the same time powers are given, that it would be unsafe to intrust even to the best and wisest of the human species. Indeed, the degradation of human nature, in the submission that is paid to the authority of tyrants under the denomination of kings, is a much juster subject of lamentation, than the degradation of some inconsiderable individuals, probably little distinguished by any estimable quality, either moral or intellectual, but who may happen to be decorated with the trappings of royalty.

Mr. Burke certainly carries his reverence for chivalry too far, when he affirms, that,
on

on account of its decline, or of that of the sentiments it inspired, "the glory of Europe " is extinguished for ever*." Europe, I think, may still subsist, very honourably subsist, and with all its glory, though all that "proud submission," and that "dignified "obedience†," of which Mr. Burke speaks, should be for ever banished from the face of the earth.

Among other things which Mr. Burke says he should look for in "the new liberty "of France," before he offered any congratulations upon it, one is, that it was combined "with the discipline and obedience of "armies‡." But I must confess, that I differ so much from Mr. Burke on this subject, that I think matters in this world will never be as they ought, while there is a single standing army subsisting, on the principles on which all the standing armies in Europe are now constituted. It may be proper, that the inhabitants of the different countries of the world should be armed, as free citizens, for their own defence, and that they should be occasionally exercised; but the standing armies of Europe, or of any other quarter of the globe, I consider, in general,

* *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 113.

† *Id. ibid.*

‡ *Ibid. p. 9.*

as only calculated to support the tyranny of princes, and to disturb the peace of the world.

" We have seen," says Mr. Burke, " the king of France sold by his soldiers for an increase of pay*" But, in justice to the French soldiers, that ought to be supposed, which I have no doubt to have been the fact, that the light and knowledge, respecting the principles of government, which had been much diffused among other classes of men in France, had also extended itself to the military, and that many of them were desirous of freeing their country from the despotism under which it had long laboured. The French troops, by deserting their king, to promote the freedom of their country, acted the part of good citizens, and of good Frenchmen. They probably remembered, that they were, or that they ought to be, not merely the troops of the king, but of the nation ; that they derived their subsistence from taxes paid by the people ; and that if they employed their arms in support of public liberty, they discharged the most important of all duties, that to their Creator only excepted, their duty to their country.

If it be imagined, that some of the French troops were influenced by the idea of double

* Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 138.

pay,

pay, we may still consider the offer made to them as a very justifiable act of policy; and if it should be supposed, that the desertion of the French troops from their king, may make other princes distrustful of their armies, it will be no great evil to mankind. Standing armies, in general, may justly be regarded as the agents and instruments of despotism; and if it should be found, that such standing armies are not always to be trusted, princes will learn to depend less upon their troops, and more upon their people.

Mr. Burke is apprehensive, that the doctrines now propagated among the French soldiers, concerning "the rights of men," will not tend to make *mere instruments* of them, which he, with M. de la Tour du Pin, thinks military men, as such, ought always to be. He also expresses his astonishment, that they should be directed, by authority, occasionally to mix in the convivial meetings and associations of their fellow citizens*; and he animadverts upon the measures that are adopted to excite them to read, as well as to engage in military exercises they being, he says, "full as well supplied with the ammunition of pamphlets

* *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 310.

" as of cartridges*." I agree in opinion with Mr. Burke, that this method of treating the French soldiers, may possibly not so well qualify them to be *mere instruments*, or machines, as the manner in which soldiers are ordinarily trained in other countries. But if they should not be such complete *instruments*, nor quite so good soldiers, they will probably be better men, and better citizens. They may be fully equal to all the purposes of defending their country against internal oppression, or foreign invasion; though they may not engage with so much alacrity, as French troops have formerly done, in enterprizes to over-turn the liberties, or to interrupt the tranquillity of foreign nations.

In enumerating some of the evils that he supposes will arise from the French revolution, and from the propagation of the principles by which it is supported, Mr. Burke says, " Kings will be tyrants from " policy, when subjects are rebels from prin-
" ciple†" To this, which has somewhat of the appearance of a threat on the part of tyranny, I answer, that if opposition to tyranny be termed rebellion, whenever just principles of government shall prevail among mankind, tyrants will cease to have any

* *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 309.

† *Ibid.* p. 116.

existence in this world, either as princes, or as men. Their policy and their power will be equally annihilated.

Mr. Burke endeavours to prove, that the late government in France has been represented in a worse light than it deserved. Men have spoken of it, he says, as if it resembled the despotic governments of Persia, or of Turkey. But, he adds, ‘ Facts do not support this resemblance. Along with much evil, there is some good in monarchy itself; and some corrective to its evil, from religion, from laws, from manners, from opinions, the French monarchy must have received; which rendered it (though by no means a free, and therefore by no means a good constitution) a despotism rather in appearance than in reality.*’ But we may certainly be of opinion, that the government of France was so despotic, as to have rendered a revolution extremely desirable, without supposing it to be “a positively destructive government†,” or “the worst of all political institutions‡.” We may readily admit, that there are governments in the world much more despotic than the late government of France; we may also admit, that the despotism of the French

* *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 189.

† *Ibid.* p. 194.

‡ *Ibid.* p. 192.

government had received some mitigation “ from religion, from laws, from manners, “ from opinions;” and yet, when we have admitted all this, we may very consistently maintain, that it was a government so radically bad, and in which there was so much despotism, that such a government ought never to have existed among mankind. In France, before the revolution, the common people were oppressed by the crown, by the nobility, and by the power of the ecclesiastics; the commonalty and peasantry groaned under the weight of unequal and unjust taxes, and of burthensome and unreasonable feudal services; the laws did not inflict punishment on the guilty, nor afford protection to innocence; liberty of conscience was not allowed, nor the freedom of speech, or of the press; *lettres de cachet* for the arbitrary imprisonment of the most respectable citizens were often obtained with facility by the mistress of a king, or of a minister; the worthiest men might be thrown into dungeons, and imprisoned at pleasure, without even knowing the offences with which they were charged; and no man could be secured, by the laws of his country, from perpetual imprisonment, or the grossest injuries and indignities, if directed or authorized by the minions of the court. Indeed, Mr. Burke himself acknowledges, that the sovereign of France had an “unlimited power
“ over

" over the persons of his subjects*." No opposition could be too great against such a power, by whomsoever it might be possessed; and we need not hesitate to pronounce, that there can be no country upon earth in which such a government ought to be endured, as that which subsisted in France before the revolution.

But Mr. Burke considers the state of population in France as an argument in favour of its government. He gives a favourable account of the population of that country, and remarks, that "no country in which "population flourishes, and is in progressive "improvements, can be under a very mis- "chievous government†." But the population of a country is certainly no criterion of the excellency of its government; at least it affords no proof that freedom is enjoyed by its inhabitants, or that the government is not despotic. The history of mankind will afford abundant instances, that the human species may subsist, and even increase in numbers, under very great degrees of oppression. Wherever, from the fertility of the soil, or any other causes, the means of subsistence are easily afforded to the common people, population will naturally increase,

* Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 195.

† Ibid. p. 189.

though the government may be oppressive and despotic. No man, who has any just ideas of civil liberty, or any attachment to it, will commend the Prussian government; and yet the population of that country has, within the last thirty years, been more increased, than that of other nations who have enjoyed a much greater degree of liberty.

Mr. Burke speaks in very high terms of the condition of France before the revolution, of the state of agriculture, of commerce, of manufactures; of her progress in the arts, her splendid edifices, of the illustrious men that the country has produced, and the distinguished figure that France has made in the history of modern Europe. But this only serves to prove, that great things may be done by such a nation as the French, though labouring under many oppressions from the form of their government. It may, however, be admitted, that the French monarchs sometimes exercised their power with a considerable degree of clemency and moderation, and that they have had some very wise and able ministers, whose administration has contributed to the prosperity of France. But notwithstanding this, there was certainly, prior to the revolution, a great degree of poverty among the middling and inferior classes of the people in that kingdom,

dom, which chiefly derived its source from the faults of its government. As for the persons of distinguished talents and character who have appeared in France, I have long observed, with admiration, as well as Mr. Burke, the many great men who have adorned that country; and have remarked the many excellent qualities which were manifested by its inhabitants; and for that reason have I the more regretted, that such a nation should be subjected to a government so totally unworthy of it, as that which subsisted in France before the revolution.

After having given a very favourable account of the state of France previous to the late revolution, Mr. Burke says, ‘ Whether the system, if it deserves such a name, now built on the ruins of that ancient monarchy, will be able to give a better account of the population and wealth of the country, which it has taken under its care, is a matter very doubtful. Instead of improving by the change, I apprehend that a long series of years must be told before it can recover in any degree the effects of this philosophic revolution, and before the nation can be replaced on its former footing.*’ A considerable scarcity of specie

* *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 196.

may naturally have been occasioned by many of the nobility, and other persons of opulence, having quitted Paris; and their emigration must also, for the present, have been injurious to trade and commerce. But these are temporary evils, which it was not in the power of the National Assembly to prevent, and for which they can deserve no censure. It may also be true, that the population of France, upon the whole, may for the present be decreased. But the nation will not eventually be the worse for being deserted by the friends of despotism; and there can be no doubt, but that when a free constitution of government has been for some time firmly established, the wealth, the population, and the general prosperity of the kingdom, will receive a very high degree of augmentation. Unfavourable circumstances might, however, at first naturally be expected; for it could not reasonably be supposed, that blessings of so inestimable a value, as those of civil and religious liberty, could be obtained in such a country as France, without some inconveniences, some dangers, and some sacrifices.

Of all the proceedings of the National Assembly of France, nothing seems to have excited so much indignation in Mr. Burke, as the confiscation of the estates of the church; and he is extremely desirous of persuading

persuading his correspondent, that the inhabitants of this country in general feel the same indignation that he does upon the subject. He affirms of the people of England, that ‘ they see with horror and alarm that ‘ enormous and shameless act of proscription* ;’ and he also says, ‘ I assure you, ‘ that there is not one public man in this ‘ kingdom, whom you would wish to quote; ‘ no not one of any party or description, ‘ who does not reprobate the dishonest, perfidious, and cruel confiscation, which the ‘ National Assembly has been compelled to ‘ make of that property which it was their ‘ first duty to protect†.’

I should be extremely unwilling to believe, that Mr. Burke has advanced what he does not himself suppose to be true; but, I confess, I can no more believe, that the generality of the people of this country, or the more respectable public men, view the sale of the church lands in France in the same light that Mr. Burke does, than I could believe an assertion, that the generality of the respectable public men in this country were Mahometans. I am fully convinced, that the greatest part of the people of this country, whether public or private men, have

* Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 156.

† Id. Ibid.

viewed this transaction without any horror, and with very little alarm, and that by many it has been entirely approved.

Much of Mr. Burke's reasoning, concerning the proceedings of the National Assembly respecting the lands of the church, is inconclusive, because it is grounded upon a principle that very few persons will admit besides himself; namely, that the possessions of the church were to be considered in the same light, and as equally sacred, with private property. But in any country, if large estates, or incomes, are appropriated to the support of a particular class of men in the community, for the discharge of public offices, or for services to be rendered to the community, the interposition of the government, or legislature, in the appropriation or disposal of such estates, or incomes, or even the seizure and confiscation of them, has always been considered as a very different thing from the seizure or confiscation of private property*. For if larger incomes are

* In one passage, Mr. Burke himself seems to be of opinion, that the revenues of such institutions as those of monasteries, were to be regarded in a different light from private property. For he says, ‘In a question of reformation, I always consider corporate bodies, whether sole or consisting of many, to be much more susceptible of a *public direction* by the *power of the state*, in the use of their property, and in the regulation of modes and habits of life in their members, than private citizens ever can, or perhaps ought to be.’ Reflections, &c.
P. 439.

appropriated to any particular class of men, for services, or supposed services, to the community, than are consistent with the general interest ; or if establishments exist, supported by large revenues, that are more detrimental than beneficial to a community ; in cases like these, the legislature have an undoubted right to interpose, and to adopt such measures as shall be most conducive to the welfare of the state.

Of the utility of ecclesiastical establishments in general, or of the utility of particular ecclesiastical establishments, different men will form different opinions. But those who believe, that ecclesiastical establishments, with large revenues, contribute much more to the perpetuation of error, and of superstition, than to the advancement of truth, and of real Christianity, must differ very essentially from Mr. Burke upon this subject. However, as to the ecclesiastical establishment of France, when we consider the great degree of superstition that was connected with that establishment, we may very properly regard what has been done respecting the church lands in that kingdom, not as arising from "wanton rapacity," but, in the language that Mr. Burke has given to the advocates for it, as "a great measure of national policy, adopted to remove an extensive, inveterate, superstitious

"stitious mischief*." That many of the Gallican clergy were men of considerable learning, and of great personal merit, as Mr. Burke has stated, I have no doubt; I always had that idea of them; but it does not therefore follow, that the ecclesiastical establishment of which they composed a part, with all the superstition attendant on it, and all its appendages, could be supported with benefit to the French nation.

As Mr. Burke feels great indignation at the sale of the church lands, so he is also extremely dissatisfied at the abolition of the monasteries†. He thinks, that the monks were as well employed as many others, and feels a considerable reluctance "to disturb "the tranquil repose of monastic quietude‡." Many members, however, of the National Assembly, might justly consider "these vast "estates," as Mr. Burke himself styles them, "of the ecclesiastic corporations§," of the monasteries and nunneries, and other institutions of that kind, as appropriated to the purposes of superstition, and as extremely injurious to the community. Independently, therefore, of the benefit which the state might derive from the appropriation of these

* Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 230.

† Ibid. p. 232, 236, 237, 238.

‡ Ibid. p. 237.

§ Ibid. p. 163.

revenues, they might be led by the purest principles of patriotism, without being either Atheists or Infidels, to concur in the abolition of these institutions. But Mr. Burke is of opinion, that if it had been necessary or proper to destroy these monasteries, their revenues might have been employed in some new institutions of a truly benevolent and public-spirited nature*. They certainly might have been so employed, and probably would, if the immediate necessities of the state had not rendered such schemes, at this time, inexpedient or impracticable.

Mr. Burke sometimes expresses himself very strongly concerning the irreligion and infidelity which have appeared in France; but there can be no reasonable doubt, that it was from that fabric of Romish superstition, which was supported in France by the revenues of the church in that kingdom, that much of the infidelity, which has there been manifested, derived its origin. Superstition and absurdity, supported by established creeds, and ceremonial observances, that will not stand the test of any rational investigation, are natural sources of scepticism and infidelity. When Christianity is deformed by superstition, or by enthusiasm,

* Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 232, 233.
234.

those persons reject it with disdain, without examination or inquiry, who would have received and embraced it cheerfully and cordially, if it had been exhibited to them unadulterated and uncorrupted, with its native excellence, in the original beauty and simplicity with which it was delivered by its divine Author.

Mr. Burke has said much concerning the importance of religion in promoting the welfare of society; and there can be no doubt, but that real religion, the sincere worship of the Deity, and the practice of virtue, tends in a very high degree to advance the best interests of men even in the present world. But I see nothing in the new constitution of France, that is not perfectly consistent with the existence of religion in that country, or which should even prevent the principles of Christianity, and the precepts which it enjoins, from being more exactly and universally adhered to, than they have ever yet appeared to be in that kingdom. By the new constitution of France, every man is to be permitted to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience; and there will be no impediment to the most extensive and successful propagation of religious truth. As to the design which Mr. Burke imputes to some of the French philosophers, of endeavouring to bring

bring about the total abolition of Christianity*, that is an evil of which no man, who really believes its divine origin, can possibly entertain any serious apprehensions.

Religion, so far as it can be promoted by any ecclesiastical establishments, is certainly chiefly promoted by the labours of the inferior clergy; and the inferior and parochial clergy of France are intended, by the new arrangements, to be placed in a better situation than they were before. But Mr. Burke says, that before the French revolution, there were about an hundred and twenty bishops in that kingdom†. Many persons, however, will probably be of opinion, that such a number of bishops, with large incomes, was not necessary for the advancement of religion in any country. Mr. Burke himself remarks, that ‘the possessions of the church, through the patronage of the crown, generally devolved upon the nobility. The bishoprics, and the great commendatory abbeys, were, with few exceptions, held by that order.’ Is it then probable, or will any man suppose, that these great ecclesiastical possessions were, in any considerable degree, really employed in the promo-

* Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 218.

† Ibid. p. 216.

‡ Ibid. p. 164.

tion of piety and virtue? Mr. Burke, during his stay in France, was enlightened on the subject of husbandry by his conversations with Carthusian monks; and from such conversations he might possibly derive his favourable opinion of monasteries, and his regret at their dissolution; but whether from his conversations with the noble and right reverend prelates, whom he also met with in France, he derived any very copious information of the nature and success of their labours in the promotion of religion, we are unable to determine.

Mr. Burke seems to suppose, that the French, in consequence of the late revolution, will lose not only their religion, but their trade, their manufactures, and even their learning*. After these strange suppositions, which are just as probable as the tales in the Arabian Nights Entertainments, Mr. Burke asks, speaking of the French nation in this imaginary degraded state, ‘What sort of a thing must be a nation of gross, stupid, ferocious, and at the same time poor and sordid barbarians, destitute of religion, honour, or manly pride, possessing nothing at present, and hoping for nothing hereafter?’ He is apprehensive,

* *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 118.

† *Id. ibid.*

that the French nation are “ going fast, and ‘ by the shortest cut, to that horrible and ‘ disgusting situation.’ ‘ Already,’ he adds, ‘ there appears a poverty of conception, a ‘ coarseness and vulgarity in all the proceedings of the Assembly, and of all their instructors. Their liberty is not liberal. Their ‘ science is presumptuous ignorance. Their ‘ humanity is savage and brutal.*’ This is the character given by Mr. Burke of the National Assembly of France, a legislative body, who have manifested a greater degree of intellectual illumination, a more ardent zeal for the general interests of the community, and for the principles of just and equal liberty, and who have exhibited more noble and sublime views, than any other body of men invested with power in that country, from the foundation of the French monarchy to the present hour.

In stating his objections to the new constitution of France, Mr. Burke intimates his apprehensions, that foreign states will not seriously enter into negotiations, relative to peace or war, with the French king, or with his ministers, while their power is so limited as it is at present†. There can, however, be no doubt, but that foreign powers will

* *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 118.

† *Ibid* p. 294.

readily enter into negociations with the French nation, or with any ministers, or executive officers, that they shall appoint, when their constitution is fully established. Mr. Burke remarks^{*} that the French ministers have already experienced the inconveniences of their situation, in the course of their proceedings relative to the differences between Spain and Great Britain^{*}: but this was probably merely occasioned by the circumstance of the French constitution being not yet finally adjusted. In no country, immediately after a revolution, and before the public affairs are fully settled, can it be expected, that the executive business of government will be administered with the same ease, and the same regularity, as during a period of greater tranquillity. As to Mr. Burke's apprehensions of the intrigues of foreign powers in the National Assembly†, this is an evil that might in a great degree be avoided by proper laws and regulations; and does not appear to be of so dangerous a tendency, as entrusting the power of making war or peace to particular individuals, who may plunge nations into hostilities, for no other reason but the mere gratification of their own pride and ambition.

* Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 296.

† Id ibid.

Mr. Burke is very copious in his remarks on the mode of electing the members of the National Assembly, and on the descriptions of men of which it is composed. He particularly objects to so great a number of practitioners of the law being returned, not is he satisfied that there should be so many physicians and country clergymen. The representation of the people of France in the National Assembly appears, however, notwithstanding all Mr. Burke's objections, to be very complete and comprehensive; men of all ranks and professions are represented, and returned as members; and there seems no good reason why we should suppose, that these country divines*, and practitioners of law

* Mr. Burke sometimes professes a great respect for the church, and for churchmen, whether of France or of England: but it would not be easy to point out a more uncandid, nor to say unjust, statement, relative to a considerable body of respectable French clergymen, than occurs in a passage of Mr. Burke's book. Speaking of the election of the representatives of the clergy to the *Tiers Etat*, he says, ' That election was so contrived, as to send a very large proportion of mere country curates to the great and arduous work of new-modelling a state; men who never had seen the state so much as in a picture; men who knew nothing of the world beyond the bounds of an obscure village; who, immersed in hopeless poverty, could regard all property, whether secular or ecclesiastical, with no other eye than that of envy; among whom must be many, who, for the smallest hope of the meanest dividend in plunder, would readily join in any attempts upon a body of wealth, in which they could hardly look to have any share, except in a general scramble.' *Reflections, &c.* p. 67. It can hardly be supposed, that any of the French *Atheists*, or *Infidels*, would have attempted to give a more dishonorable account

law and physic, will not, to say the least, make full as good legislators, as many of those fox-hunters and sportsmen, who have often appeared in the former parliaments of Great Britain; and who have been much more attentive to the preservation of the game, than to the preservation of the liberties, or to the promotion of the interests of their country. If the people of France, in returning their members to the National Assembly, are apt to shew a preference for professional men, that is no presumptive argument of any propensity in the French nation to a disregard of literature, or inattention to its use and its advantages. As to the French clergymen who are returned, Mr. Burke himself informs us, that he met with many men of learning and merit among the superior French clergy; and there can be no reasonable doubt, but that there are also many men of merit among the inferior clergy, who will discharge the trust reposed in them, as members of the National Assembly, with integrity and with ability.

Whether in the new constitution of France, sufficient care has been taken, to keep the

count than this of their clergy. It may not be improper to observe here, that the persons whom Mr. Burke, according to the French phraseology, terms curates, are the same class of men, who in England would be termed rectors, or vicars; in other words, the parochial clergy.

legislative and the executive powers distinct, or whether there are any material defects in the constitution, I pretend not to decide. A man may approve of the great principles on which the revolution has been conducted, and may think very highly of the general views and conduct of the National Assembly, without approving of every particular measure that they may have adopted. If any defects should be discovered in the new constitution of France, there is so much information, knowledge, and good sense, diffused throughout that nation, that there is little reason to doubt, but that these defects will be rectified, and such a constitution finally established, as will in an eminent degree promote the freedom and the happiness of the people. Whatever new arrangements they may make in their mode of government, there can be no reason to apprehend, that so enlightened a people will ever descend, from the felicity and the dignity of freedom, to the wretchedness and the dis-honour necessarily attendant on a despotic government.

Mr. Burke's "Reflections on the Revolution in France," is a very splendid composition in point of language; he often displays a very luxuriant imagination; but he is extremely deficient in just reasoning. He has a great profusion of rhetoric, but is very far

far from having an equal proportion of logic; and his statement of facts, or what he relates as facts, relative to the French revolution, has often much more of the appearance of an historical romance, than of a just or impartial account of the real state of things. Besides his tropes and figures, he has taken great pains to engage the passions of his readers in opposition to the French revolution. He has a great dislike to Old Jewry sermons; but I have never met with any Old Jewry sermon that contained so much of the false pathetic, as is to be found in this publication of Mr. Burke. With a very fine imagination, he appears to labour under strong prejudices; and, indeed, of all writers, ancient or modern, he is the most eloquent and ingenious advocate for the utility and the advantages that result from prejudice*.

In the course of his book Mr. Burke has repeatedly expressed a high veneration for kings, and no inconsiderable degree of reverence for the order of nobility. There was, however, a time, when he did not appear to have such a profound respect either for kings or nobles. In his very masterly speech, in 1780, on presenting to the House of Commons a plan for the reform of the

* *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 129, 130.

civil list establishment, he observes, that "kings are naturally lovers of low company* ;" and in the same speech he also says, that "many of the nobility are as perfectly willing to act the part of flatterers, tale-bearers, parasites, pimps, and buffoons, as any of the lowest and vilest of mankind can possibly be." I do not in the least controvert the truth of these positions of Mr. Burke, but I must observe, that they certainly tend to diminish that "awe," with which he says, we "look up to kings†," and somewhat of that profound respect which he seems inclined to recommend for the nobility; and to lead us to think, that no powers or privileges ought to be conferred on either kings or lords, that may probably be employed not to the benefit, but to the injury of the community.

As Mr. Burke has given a very injurious representation of the proceedings of the National Assembly of France, and of the Revolution in that country, so he has also given an account of the Revolution in England, in 1688, that is highly dishonourable to our ancestors, and repugnant to the most im-

* Speech of Edmund Burke, Esq; p. 68 8vo., 1780.

† Ibid p. 69.

‡ Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 128.

portant principles of the British constitution. He particularly labours to refute the opinion, that the crown of England is derived from the choice of the people, and contends in very strong terms for a claim of hereditary right; and what is singularly curious, he grounds his arguments, in support of this claim, on the circumstances and events that attended and were consequent to the Revolution. He speaks of the act of settlement, as intended to form an establishment, to secure that kind of succession, which was "TO PRECLUDE A CHOICE OF THE PEOPLE FOR EVER*;" and of the "Declaration of Right (the act of the 1st of William and Mary, sess. 2. ch. 2.)" he says, that it "is the corner-stone of our constitution, as reinforced, explained, improved, and its fundamental principles FOR EVER SETTLED†." He also speaks of the rights and liberties of the subject, and the succession of the crown, as being "bound indissolubly together‡," as if the liberties of the people would cease to exist, if there were any alteration of the hereditary succession.

"The whole tenor of our history will shew, that a claim to the crown founded merely

* Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 33.

† Ibid. p. 21.

‡ Ibid. p. 22.

on hereditary right, without the concurrence and approbation of the people and the parliament, is an absurd claim, which can never be supported. At least seven instances occur, from the time of William the Norman to the present period, in which the regular line of hereditary succession has been broken*; and these deviations have been repeatedly authorized by express acts of the legislature. Indeed, those who attend to the frequency with which these deviations from the order of lineal succession occur in our history, can hardly avoid feeling some astonishment, that any man should even dream

* William I. commonly called the Conqueror, who may be considered as at the head of that sacred line of hereditary succession, for which Mr. Burke seems to have so much reverence, was the bastard son of Robert, duke of Normandy. He was not succeeded by his eldest son, but by a younger son, generally known by the name of William Rufus, and he was afterwards succeeded by Henry I. the youngest son of William I. though Robert, the eldest son of the Conqueror, was yet living. Henry I. left a daughter, Maud, who was married to the emperor Henry IV. but she did not succeed to the crown of England, but the throne was ascended by Stephen, earl of Blois, who was the son of Ad la, the fourth daughter of William I. Stephen was succeeded by Henry Plantagenet, son to the empress Maud.—Richard II. was dethroned, and was succeeded by Henry, duke of Lancaster, son of John of Gaunt.—Henry VI. was de-throned, and succeeded by Edward, duke of York, under the title of Edward IV. Soon after that prince's death, Richard, duke of Gloucester, mounted the throne, under the title of Richard III. He was killed in Bosworth field, and succeeded by Henry VII. whose title to the crown could be very ill supported upon any principles of hereditary succession.

of the “unbroken unity*” of the succession to the crown of England. The truth is, that the people of this country have in general preferred an hereditary succession of their princes, in order to avoid those tumults and convulsions which might be attendant on an elective monarchy. But the deviations from a regular, hereditary succession, are so many, as to afford sufficient evidence, that it was the sense both of the people and the parliament, from the earliest times to the present, that they had a right to alter the order of succession, whenever the safety and welfare of the nation should require it.

The bill of exclusion, which passed the House of Commons in 1680, affords a full proof of the general sense of the nation at that period, of the right of parliament, as acting for the people, to change the order of succession. There was at that time no law which excluded a Papist from the throne; and James, duke of York, was then the next heir to the crown, according to the order of lineal succession. But by the Exclusion bill, it was enacted, ‘That James, duke of York, Albany, and Ulster, should be incapable of inheriting the crowns of Eng-

* Mr. Burke says, that the princess Sophia was named in the Act of Settlement, “that the monarchy might preserve an *unbroken unity through all ages:*” Reflections, &c. p. 34. land,

land, Scotland, and Ireland, with the dependencies; and of enjoying any of the titles, rights, prerogatives, and revenues, belonging to the said crowns.' In the debates upon this bill, it was repeatedly observed in the House of Commons, that "the succession to the crown had been formerly often changed by acts of parliament;" and Mr. Hume, who was no great friend to the claims of the people, nor a very impartial reporter of parliamentary debates on the side of the people, yet states, in his account of the debates on the bill of Exclusion, the following as some of the arguments then used by the advocates for that bill: 'In England, the legislative power is lodged in king, lords, and commons, which comprehend every order of the community: And there is no pretext for exempting any circumstance of government, not even the succession of the crown, from so full and decisive a jurisdiction*. Even express declarations

* Sir Thomas Smith, who was secretary of State in the reign of queen Elizabeth, expresses himself in the following terms concerning the power and authority of parliaments, in his 'Treatise of the "Common-wealth of England":' 'The parliament abrogateth old laws, and maketh new; giveth orders for things past, and for things hereafter to be followed; changeth right and possessions of private men, extirpateh bishards, establisheth forms of religion, altereth weights and measures, GIVE THA FORM OF SUCCESSION TO THE CROWN, defineth of doubtful right, whereof is no law already made; appointeth subsidies, tailles, taxes, and impositions; giveth molt free pardons and

' clarations have, in this particular, been
 ' made of parliamentary authority : instances
 ' have occurred, where it has been exerted :
 ' and though prudential reasons may justly
 ' be alledged, why such innovations should
 ' never be attempted but on extraordinary
 ' occasions, THE POWER AND RIGHT ARE
 ' FOR EVER VESTED IN THE COMMU-
 ' NITY*.'

Mr. Burke remarks, that ' If ever there
 ' was a time favourable for establishing the
 ' principle, that a king of popular choice was
 ' the only legal king, without all doubt it
 ' was at the Revolution†.' I agree with Mr.
 Burke, that this was a very favourable time
 for that purpose ; and think, that more ought
 to have been done in support of the rights
 of the people, than was done at that period,
 and that additional securities should have
 been required by the nation, in order to pre-
 vent future abuses of power, or exertions of
 regal tyranny. When, therefore, I join with
 others in commemorating the Revolution, I
 do not do it as commemorating a transaction,

' and absolutions, restoreth in blood and name ; as the highest
 ' court, condemneth or absolveth whom the prince will put to
 ' that trial. And, to be short, all that ever the people of Rome
 ' might do, either in *Censuriatis Comitiis*, or *Tribunitiis*, the
 ' same may be done by the parliament of England.' *Smith's Common-wealth of England*, p. 77 edit Lond. 1633.

* History of England, vol. VIII. p. 132. edit. 8vo. 1763.

† Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 23.

by which the people obtained all that they have a right to claim, but as an event upon the whole very favourable to liberty, and by which the rights of the people were more clearly ascertained than at any preceding period. This is a very just ground for commemorating the Revolution, though we may have a full conviction, that it was attended with defects, and have a sincere desire that those defects should be rectified.

Mr. Burke says, ‘ So far is it from being true, that we acquired a right by the Revolution to elect our kings, that if we had possessed it before, the English nation did at that time most solemnly renounce and abdicate it, for themselves and for all their posterity for ever*.’ This most strange idea is grounded on the act of succession, by which the parliament, in the language generally used in such acts, bind themselves, “ their heirs and their posterity†.” But it is not to be supposed, that they had any just claim, or that they imagined they had any claim to bind the people of England, in any matters important to the community, in such a manner as could not hereafter be altered. The claim would have been absurd; but they

* Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 27.

† Ibid. p. 33.

conceived, from the authority with which they were invested, that they had a right to make such arrangements, respecting the succession, or any other important points mentioned in the act, as they judged to be beneficial to the nation ; and that these arrangements should be binding upon the nation, till some other alteration should be made by the same authority ; that is, by the authority of the people and parliament of England. But, indeed, the competency of parliament to alter the succession, and to make new laws and regulations concerning it, has been established by an express act of the legislature, and it has been made highly penal to advance a contrary doctrine ; for by an act passed in the sixth year of the reign of queen Anne, it was enacted, that if any person should affirm, ‘ That the kings or queens of this realm, with and by the authority of parliament, are not able to make laws and statutes of sufficient force and validity to limit and bind the crown, and the descent, limitation, inheritance, and government thereof, every such person or persons shall incur the danger and penalty of *præmunire*, mentioned in the statute of *præmunire* made in the sixteenth year of the reign of king Richard the Second.*’

* Cay's edition of the Statutes, vol. III. p. 549.

It is observed by Mr. Burke, that in the "Act declaring the Rights and Liberties of the Subject, and settling the Succession of the Crown," commonly called *the Bill of Rights*, "not one word is said, nor one suggestion made, of a general right "to choose our own governors; to cashier them for misconduct; and to form a government for ourselves*." But these ideas were in reality necessarily implied in the act, though not directly and particularly expressed. In this act it is stated, that the declaration and resolution, by which William and Mary were raised to the throne, were made by "the lords spiritual and temporal, and commons assembled at Westminster, lawfully and freely REPRESENTING ALL THE ESTATES OF THE PEOPLE OF THIS REALM." It was by their authority that the crown was transferred from king James the Second to the prince and princess of Orange. This was certainly a claim made and asserted by the nation, or by the parliament acting in their name, and by their authority, of a right of choosing their own governors. For if they had a right to dethrone James, and to confer the crown on the prince of Orange, who was not the lineal successor, they had an equal right to take any other person, if they had judged it beneficial to the nation. Whether they would choose William, prince of

* *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 21.

Orange, or any other person, was not a question of right, but of political expediency. William's wife Mary, who approached more nearly to the character of a lineal successor than her husband, though made nominally queen, was excluded, by the act of parliament which raised them to the throne, from real authority; for it was expressly enacted, that "the entire, perfect, and full exercise of the royal power and government, should be only in, and executed by his majesty."

Before William and Mary were raised to the throne, it was debated in both houses, "Whether there was not an original contract between king and people?" and in both houses it was resolved in the affirmative. By both houses it was resolved, "That king James had broken the original contract;" and upon these votes was grounded the final resolution, that the throne was become vacant. In the bill of rights, the act of misconduct and tyranny of king James II. was particularly stated; and the whole of the proceedings, taken together, amounted to a full and explicit declaration, that a king of England might, constitutionally, be dethroned for tyranny; or, in other words, for a violation of the contract between him and the people. And if the parliament of England justly claimed and exercised a right of dethroning

throning a king for tyranny, and of appointing whom they pleased to succeed him, there can be no doubt, but they have an equal right to make such alterations in their administration, or mode of government, as they shall judge to be most advantageous to the community. It may also be observed, that if the parliament and people of England had a right to dethrone James the Second for tyranny and misconduct, they have an equal right to dethrone any other prince, of any other family, in similar circumstances; and of the degree of tyranny and misconduct, which would justify them in such a case, they are the sole and proper judges.

Mr. Burke says, that ‘the Revolution was ‘made to preserve our *ancient* indisputable ‘laws and liberties, and that *ancient* consti-‘tution of government, which is our *sole se- curity* for law and liberty*.’ But is there a man of sense in the kingdom, excepting Mr. Burke, who can possibly be of opinion, that at such a period as the Revolution, the people had not a right to adopt every measure that would tend to promote the general interests and freedom of the nation, or that we have no other security for law and liberty, or no other claim to our rights, but what is merely grounded on the conduct, or the

* *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 44.

acquisitions of our ancestors? Our ingenious author, indeed, takes abundant pains to point out the advantages of claiming our rights, not from reason, or from nature, but from *inheritance*. In an age, in which men are led to scrutinize exactly into the nature of government, and to trace it to its first principles, he would lead them to the ideas of barbarous and Gothic ages, and to ancient superstitions, which even the votaries of Popery now find it necessary to abandon. An appeal to the rights of men, if prosecuted to its natural and legitimate consequences, will give liberty to the whole human race; but an appeal to the rights and privileges of ancestors, such rights and privileges as can be clearly and distinctly ascertained and proved, will give liberty only to a small part of the human species, and much of what is communicated will be necessarily defective and imperfect.

Mr. Burke observes, that revolutions "can rarely, if ever, be performed without force;" and that "no government could stand a moment, if it could be blown down with any thing so loose and indefinite, as an opinion of *misconduct*.*" It is true, that revolutions ought not to be attempted, on account of trifling instances of miscon-

* *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 38, 42

duct in government; and there is little reason to apprehend, that any attempts of that kind will be made on such a ground. Nations do not dethrone their kings but for some important reason, for unjust extensions of power, or flagrant violations of the duties of the regal office. Mr. Locke justly remarks, that ‘ Revolutions happen not upon ‘ every little mismanagement of public af- ‘ fairs. Great mistakes in the ruling part, ‘ many wrongs and inconvenient laws, and ‘ all the slips of human frailty, will be borne ‘ by the people without mutiny or mur- ‘ mur. But if a long train of abuses, pre- ‘ varications, and artifices, all tending the ‘ same way, make the design visible to the ‘ people, and they cannot but feel what ‘ they lie under, and see whither they are ‘ going; it is not to be wondered, that they ‘ should then rouze themselves, and endea- ‘ vour to put the rule into such hands which ‘ may secure to them the ends for which ‘ government was at first erected; and with- ‘ out which, ancient names, and specious ‘ forms, are so far from being better, that ‘ they are much worse than the state of na- ‘ ture, or pure anarchy; the inconveniences ‘ being all as great and as near, but the ‘ remedy farther off, and more difficult.’

* Treatise on Civil Government, Book II. §. 225.

On a full consideration of all that has been advanced by Mr. Burke, on the subject of the Revolution in England, in 1688, we may venture to affirm, that his account of that transaction, and his statement of the principles on which it was effected, and which result from it, are not grounded upon the ideas of our ancestors, nor upon the ideas of those who were the most instrumental in bringing about that great event; and that they are contrary to all just sentiments respecting the rights of human nature, and the true origin and design of civil government. Mr. Burke has intimated his apprehensions, that the French nation have formed erroneous ideas of the opinions and dispositions of the people of England, from "certain publications*", which have appeared in this country, meaning, apparently, the publications of the Constitutional and the Revolution Societies. But, I must confess, that I have met with no publications that appeared to me so grossly to misrepresent the sentiments and dispositions of the people of England, respecting either the late French Revolution, or our own Revolution in 1688, as Mr. Burke's "Reflections on "the Revolution in France."

It is asserted by Mr. Burke, that the body of the people of England utterly disclaim,

* Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 126.

and will resist the practical assertion of "with their lives and fortunes," those principles which Dr. Price has stated to be the principles of the Revolution; namely, that we have a right "to choose our own governors; to cashier them for misconduct; " and to frame a government for ourselves.* But I am so fully convinced, that Mr. Burke's ideas upon this subject are totally ill founded, that if ever the sense of the inhabitants of this country should be taken upon the following questions, Whether all legitimate power is, or is not, derived from the people? Whether all those, who are invested with the powers of government, are accountable to the nation for their discharge of the offices entrusted to them? Whether the people have not a right to dethrone a king for tyranny? and, Whether the people and parliament of England have not also a right to adopt that mode of government, which they conceive to be most conducive to their own advantage? I have no doubt, but that these questions would be answered by the people of England in the affirmative, with a voice that should be heard to the most distant parts of the kingdom, and that no prince or minister would dare to contradict.

* Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 20, 21.

Mr. Burke says, that the present king
 " holds his crown in contempt of the choice
 " of the Revolution Society*." But I hope,
 that he does not hold it in contempt of the
 people of England, or of their choice or ap-
 probation. Sir William Temple informs us,
 that Mons. Gourville, who had resided a
 considerable time in England, and observed
 much of the temper and disposition of the
 people, said to him at Brussels. " A King
 " of England, who will be THE MAN OF
 " HIS PEOPLE, is the greatest King in the
 " World; but, if he will be something more,
 " by G—, HE IS NOTHING AT ALL†." This
 speech Sir William reported to Charles II.
 because he knew, he says, that the king
 esteemed Mons. Gourville, as having " the
 " soundest head of any Frenchman he had
 " ever seen." These sentiments of Mons.
 Gourville's, respecting the kings of England,
 Charles did not, however, at first, seem per-
 fectly to relish; but, after a little consid-
 eration, he appeared to acquiesce in them;
 and, if these sentiments could be acquiesced
 in, even apparently, by a prince of the house
 of Stuart, I hope no prince of the house of
 Hanover will forget, that his family derive
 their present dignity from the parliament
 and people of England, and that to secure

* Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 19.

† Temple's Memoirs, part II. p. 33, 34. edit. 1700.

and establish their rights was the design and the end of their elevation.

Mr. Burke appears extremely desirous to represent government as a science involved in very profound mysteries; and, indeed, of all the theories of government which I have met with, that of Mr. Burke seems to be the most abstruse, and the most obscure. In support of such a mysterious representation of the nature of government, he says, that "The nature of man is intricate; the objects of society are of the greatest possible complexity*." But, however intricate may be the nature of man, however complex the objects of human society, there are certain maxims and principles, respecting government, which are obvious to the most common understandings, whenever a due attention be paid to the subject. Among these maxims, the following may be enumerated, which I have stated, in a former publication, as the sentiments of Mr. Locke 'That all legitimate government is derived from the consent of the people; that men are naturally equal, and that no one has a right to injure another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions; and that no man in civil society ought to be subject to the arbitrary will of others, but only to known

* Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 91.

' and

' and established laws, made by general consent, for the common benefit. That no taxes are to be levied on the people, without the consent of the majority, given by themselves, or by their deputies. That the ruling power ought to govern by declared and received laws, and not by extemporary dictates, and undetermined resolutions. That kings and princes, magistrates and rulers of every class, have no just authority but what is delegated to them by the people; and which, when not employed for their benefit, the people have always a right to resume, in whatever hands it may be placed*.' These principles of Mr. LOCKE are certainly much more perspicuous, than the account of the rights of men given by Mr. Burke†, and they are founded on unquestionable reason.

Mr. Burke observes, that ' If civil society be the offspring of convention, that convention must be its law†.' But allowing civil society to be the offspring of convention, if a civil convention had been made in any country, in the last century, or in two or ten centuries before, which was found to be injurious to the majority of the com-

* Vindication of the Political Principles of Mr. Locke, p. 96, 97.

† Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 87, 88, 89.

‡ Ibid. p. 87.

munity, they would have an undoubted right to demand a new convention, and to settle such a form of civil society, and establish such laws, as should be more equitable, and more conducive to the general welfare. Mr. Burke also says, ‘ How can any man claim, ‘ under the conventions of civil society, ‘ rights which do not so much as suppose ‘ its existence* ?’ To which it may be answered, that though every man may be obliged, so far as he can do it conscientiously, to comply with the particular conventions of that civil society in which he lives, while he continues in it, yet that is no reason whatever why the majority of that or any other society, if they have, or suppose they have, acquired more just ideas of the nature of government than were possessed by their ancestors, should not make such alterations in the original convention, or adopt any such new mode of government, as they may conceive to be best adapted to promote the common benefit. Nor does it follow, because a man in civil society is not, in a dispute with another, to be judge in his own cause†, that therefore the majority of the members of any civil community have not a right to establish a government for their own advantage.

* Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 88.

† Ibid. p. §8.

But

But Mr. Burke likewise says, that ‘ as ‘ to the share of power, authority, and di-‘ rection, which each individual ought to ‘ have in the management of the state, that ‘ I must deny to be among the direct origi-‘ nal rights of man in civil society*. Cer-‘ tainly no individual man has a right to claim the office of magistrate, or minister of state, or other office of authority in the govern-‘ ment; but it must be an original right of men in civil society, to adopt those measures that are most conducive to the welfare of the whole, and of consequence to appoint such men to public offices, or to establish such a mode of government, as the majority shall judge best calculated to advance the ge-‘ neral happiness.

THE RIGHTS OF MEN is a phrase to which Mr. Burke seems to have an extreme aversion, though it is, perhaps, one of those expressive phrases, which are not easily altered for the better. But notwithstanding his dislike to this expression, there are cer-‘ tainly natural rights, independently of all positive law or appointment. Mr. Burke, however, seems to have a much higher idea of the value and importance of property, than of those general rights to which all men have an equal claim. He appears to be of

* Reflections on the Revolution in France, p. 87.

opinion, that property can never be too well secured, though he is far from having the same anxiety to secure the rights of human nature. But is not personal liberty as sacred a possession, as any species of property that we can inherit from our ancestors? Is not the right of the mechanic and the labourer to the profits of their labour, to the estimation of the value of their labour, or to the choice of the manner in which they will exercise their talents, as clear as the right to any other property? And yet these rights are often invaded by unjust and unequal laws, or by acts of power that receive the sanction of government. This is a subject into which I feel myself inclined to enter upon a more full discussion; but it would carry me beyond the limits which I have prescribed to myself in this publication.

Mr. Burke remarks, that ‘the body of the community, whenever it can come to act, can meet with no effectual resistance; but till power and right are the same, the whole body of them has no right inconsistent with virtue, and the first of all virtues, prudence*.’ Whether prudence be the first of all virtues, may reasonably be questioned; it is always the first of all virtues with selfish men; but I shall readily

* *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 92.

admit,

admit, that the body of the community, any more than private individuals, have no right to violate the rules of justice. It is, however, perfectly agreeable to the rules of virtue, and of justice, that the majority in any country, or of any community, should establish that mode of government, which they conceive to be best calculated to promote the general happiness; and this is all that is contended for by the advocates for the rights of men.

In the course of his animadversions on Dr. Price's sermon, preached to the Revolution Society in 1789, Mr. Burke expresses an high degree of indignation against political sermons. 'Politics and the pulpit,' he says, 'are terms that have little agreement. ' No sound ought to be heard in the church ' but the healing voice of Christian charity. ' —Surely the church is a place where one ' day's truce ought to be allowed to the ' dissensions and animosities of mankind*.' Mr. Burke is mistaken in supposing, as it appears he does†, that the Revolution Society have regularly had annual sermons. Only two sermons have been preached to that society for many years past. Many sermons, however, are preached in the church

* *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 14.

† *Ibid.* p. 4.

of England against the Dissenters; many of those sermons are printed; and those who give themselves the trouble of perusing them will find, that, in general, they contain very little of "the healing voice of Christian charity." As to political sermons, it is an incontrovertible fact, that a much greater number of sermons of this kind are preached by clergymen of the church of England, than by any Dissenting ministers. In the sermons that are preached before the two houses of parliament, on the 30th of January, and the 29th of May, politics are, I believe, almost invariably introduced; and this is also the case, on those days, in many other pulpits throughout the kingdom. It seems to have been the intention of the legislature, and of the governors of the church, that it should be so; for politics are even introduced into the prayers appointed for those days by public authority. Nor, indeed, is it easy, either for a clergyman of the church of England, or a Dissenting minister, to avoid entering upon politics, when the very purpose, for which their congregations are assembled, is the celebration of a political event; and if they were wholly to decline politics on such occasions, they would not give very general satisfaction to their auditors. But if archbishops, and bishops, and deans, and archdeacons, and inferior clergymen, employ themselves on the 30th of January, and the

the 29th of May, and on similar fasts and festivals, in inculcating the principles of passive obedience and non-resistance, or of a more moderate and limited Toryism, or, as in candour we must acknowledge is sometimes the case, in propagating political sentiments of a much better tendency, it cannot be an evil of great magnitude, that some Dissenting ministers should occasionally employ themselves in explaining to their auditors the proper duties of men, as citizens, in a free country; if they should point out to them the true nature and design of government; and exhort them to a just zeal in support of those great principles of civil and religious liberty, which are essentially connected with the best interests of their country. Whatever censure such Dissenting ministers may incur, on occasions of this kind, from the servile flatterers of power, they will not be wholly destitute of approbation, or applause, from those who have a just sense of the dignity, and of the rights of human nature.

As Mr. Burke speaks in very honourable terms of the superior clergy of France, though he does not express himself quite so handsomely of those of the inferior order, so he also speaks in very high terms of the advantages resulting to religion from the prelates of the church of England. He seems much delighted, that in this country, religion "ex-
" alts

" alts her mitred head in courts and parlia-
 " ments* ;" and that the nation pays so
 much honour to " the high magistrates of its
 " church†." It may, however, be remarked,
 that these " high magistrates of the church,"
 are a sort of people of whom we read no-
 thing in the New Testament ; and, indeed,
 Mr. Burke's ideas of religion, in several re-
 spects, seem much better adapted to the
 church of Rome, than to the principles of
 any Protestant church in Europe. But Mr.
 Burke thinks that these dignified prelates, on
 account of their rank and riches, are the
 more likely to have their doctrines properly
 attended to by " the wealthy and powerful
 " of long standing." I am however, not
 very certain, that our nobility, and persons
 of rank and fortune, receive much of their
 religious instruction from the bishops. I sus-
 pect, that the information which they re-
 ceive from the clergy, on the topics of reli-
 gion and morality, is chiefly from those who
 are not decorated with mitres ; and that the
 piety and virtue, manifested by our lay lords,
 is but a very small part of it derived, from
 the occasional sermons, or occasional pastoral
 conversation, of our right reverend prelates.

I

Nor

* Reflections, &c. p. 153.

† Ibid. p. 154.

‡ Mr. Burke is inclined to make a most liberal provision for the
 bishops ; for them he approves of such revenues as those of
 Winchester, or Durham ; but, in his theory of government, he
 does

Nor will I take upon me to determine, how much the piety of the lay lords may have been increased, by observing the uniformity with which the generality of our right reverend prelates have voted, in former parliaments, in support of every measure of every minister for the time being, without diverting much of their attention from their theological studies, by any laborious inquiries into the rectitude of the measures which they supported.

Since the Revolution in France, many of the most enlightened inhabitants of that kingdom have shewn a great desire to be on pacific terms with England, and have even appeared extremely solicitous, that real friendship and harmony may subsist between the two nations. I sincerely wish, that these sentiments may be cordially cherished and cultivated on our part, and that perpetual peace and friendship may be established between Great Britain and France, and the general welfare and freedom of the human race promoted by their united efforts. An alliance

does not make, at least in this world, a very comfortable provision for the poor. ‘They must respect,’ he says, ‘that property of which they cannot partake. They must labour to obtain what by labour can be obtained; and when they find, as they commonly do, the success disproportioned to the endeavour, they must be taught their consolation in THE FINAL PROPORTIONS OF ETERNAL JUSTICE.’ Reflections, &c. p. 35¹.

between

between Great Britain, and a free country, as France now is, but little separated from us, must be much more honourable and advantageous, than an alliance with a German electorate, at a considerable distance from us, whose views are military and despotic, with which we have no common interests, and no natural connexion.

Instances have recently occurred, of foreign powers interfering, in the internal disputes of other countries, in order to maintain the authority, or the despotic claims, of princes and sovereigns against their subjects. Such interpositions ought ever to be considered as flagrant violations of justice, and of the law of nations. No prince who requires any such interposition, in his own behalf, and against his subjects, can ever be worthy of assistance or support. In the present state of the world nothing can be more alarming, than combinations of powerful and military princes, to prevent the inhabitants of different countries from asserting their rights, improving their forms of government, and advancing human liberty, and human happiness. Such iniquitous interpositions may, however, possibly be termed, preserving the Balance of Europe. But all liberty may be banished from the face of the globe, if the great tyrants of the earth are suffered to join together, to support each other in their different

different usurpations, and in their various oppressions of their subjects. Such combinations carry in them a very high degree of moral turpitude, and ought to meet with the most vigorous and determined opposition from all the sincere friends to the rights of mankind, and to the general interests of humanity.

F I N I S.





